Til Def
JODIE KING

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PLAYLIST

Figure You Out – VIOLA
Feeding The Gods – Wind Walkers
Sleepyhead – Jutes
The Fight Within – Memphis May Fire
Awaken – Breaking Benjamin
Take Me Back To Eden – Sleep Token
Fallout – Sleep Theory
DArkSide – Bring Me The Horizon
Watch The World Burn – Falling In Reverse
Can You Feel My Heart – Bring Me The Horizon
Crawling – Linkin Park
Bad For Me – VIOLA
Unsteady – X Ambassadors
Empty – Letdown.
Can I – Drake
Let You Down – NF
Mistake – NF
Hangfire – Wind Walkers

For the men who have carried unseen scars and
unspoken pain, this is a dedication to your strength.
A reminder that even in the depths of darkness,
you are not invisible.

You are *seen.*

You are *loved.*

And above all, you are *worthy*—
of *healing*, of *hope*, of a *new beginning*.

- Jodie King

To the reader who isn’t afraid to get their fucking fingers wet while turning these pages,
(Dirty, dirty.)

who craves for horror wrapped in filthy smut,
(That’s why you’re really here, isn’t it?)

pain twisted with pleasure, and the seductive chaos of a beautifully unhinged mind unraveling.

Here’s to the shadows we chase, the healing we feel and the morally black souls we can’t help but love.

May you continue to revel in the darkness,
my kings and queens.

This absolute carnage was written for you.

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Trigger and Content Warnings

For the full list of fifty-one trigger warnings, please scan this QR code, where you will be directed to my website –

Authors Note: These warnings are laid bare; it is now your choice to read this book or not. Please take every single warning with seriousness and beyond. Your mental health matters.

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PROLOGUE

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TY

Aged Thirteen

I creep slowly down the dim hallway of our family mansion, stretching long and silent around me. My bare feet make no sound on the marble floors as I move closer to my parents' bedroom. I feel how heavy the axe is in carrying in both hands. It's my dad's. But tonight, it's something else.

She's dead. The thought loops in my mind, like it has every night, driving me crazy. *They've got to die before they kill me—or anyone else.*

The double doors to their bedroom are wide open, showing the size of their room. The massive bed is in the centre, and I can hear my father's snores from the doorway—deep and rumbling. My fingers squeeze around the axe handle, my knuckles whitening as I step inside, the fur rug brushing between my toes.

I edge closer to my father's side of the bed. His face is slack, peaceful, almost unrecognizable from the man I've seen for all my life—angry, nasty, cruel. A tightness builds in my body, and it aches as I stare down at him. His chest rises and falls steadily, completely unaware of what I'm about to do to him.

The axe feels too heavy in my hands as I struggle to lift it, raising it high above my head. My breath shakes as I suck in air, readying myself. I shift my grip, inhaling quickly, zoning in on his throat, the vulnerable line of skin that will silence this monster forever

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CHAPTER ONE

Raven

Sacred Heights Asylum. The name itself carries an unsettling feeling. Established in 1712, it's stood for centuries in a small town named Morbid Crypt. This isn't just any asylum—it's an institute that houses the criminally insane, the kind of place where the darkest minds go to fester, and now, for the next month, it's where I'll be working.

As a student therapist, I jumped at the opportunity to intern there. Having Sacred Heights on my résumé is basically a golden ticket to a career in mental health once I complete my training next year. Still, I'd be lying if I said I wasn't nervous. The thought of walking into a place with centuries of history absorbed by madness… it does something to you. But either way, I'm determined.

Four hours away from the city, I've rented a small house for the time being, not too far from the asylum. This place is isolated, surrounded by woodland and scattered homes, but I don't mind. There's no one waiting for me back home anyway, not since Dad died three years ago. I've been alone ever since. Except for my kitten, Midnight, who has been with me for the last three months and she's with me on this journey.

We stayed there for the first time last night, and to say it's an absolute dump would be an understatement; the place was falling apart from the inside out. The landlord did me dirty; it was nothing like what he'd advertised. I was so close to leaving as soon as I walked in there, but unfortunately, because this town doesn't have much to offer, it was the only option without traveling in and out of the city. When I woke up this morning and left, I noticed something I hadn't last night because it was dark by the time I arrived; a graveyard, right opposite the house, which just set the entire eerie mood of this small town, but me and Midnight bared it. We'll have to get through it.

Dad always used to say, “Raven, if you want the finer things in life, you’ve got to work your ass off for them. You just have to just get on with it.”

Back then, we had no idea that I’d end up moving across state for a month, staying in some weird ass town and diving headfirst into a system that tries to sway the minds of the insane. I often wonder what he would have thought of my choices. He’d probably either tell me I’m out of my own damn mind for doing it, talking me out of it or that I’m a badass for stepping up to such a challenge. Knowing him, it could have gone either way.

When my dad died, everything inside me shattered, but it wasn’t just death—it was the way it happened. My dad took his own life. One minute he was here, my entire world, and the next, he was gone, swallowed by a darkness I hadn’t even known he carried. I remember the shock of it, the way it slammed into me like a tidal wave, dragging me under.

I kept asking myself why—why didn’t I see it? Why didn’t I notice his pain? Why didn’t I do something? Why didn’t he tell me? Did I do something wrong? Didn’t he feel he could confine in me?

The blow of it made me isolate myself; I didn’t eat; I didn’t sleep; I didn’t socialize. My mind was consumed by guilt and grief, replaying every conversation, every missed sign. I thought, for a long time, about following him. About ending it all and being done with the pain. Feeling that alone, like no one could possibly understand or pull me out of it, was terrifying. The world felt like an empty, hollow shell, and I didn’t think I’d ever climb out of the darkness.

But somehow, I did.

Not all at once, and I’m not perfect, I never will be, but I’m better. Grief doesn’t go away, but it changes. It became something I carried, a shadow that walked with me, but one I learned to live beside. And in that learning, I realized something. If I could survive the depths of my own darkness, maybe I could help someone else survive theirs. Maybe I could be the person who saw the hidden pain that others, like my dad, tried so hard to hide.

Maybe I could be the voice that said, *I see you* or even be a light for one person. If I could give them a reason to keep going when they thought they

couldn’t, then maybe all of it—my grief, my struggles, my guilt—meant something. Becoming a therapist wasn’t just a career choice really; it was a calling born from my own suffering. I knew what it felt like to fall into that void, to feel like no one could possibly understand.

So here I am. Ready to take on the darkest of the dark and hopefully understand the gloomiest depths of madness.

After a restless night of sleep, I dragged myself out of bed extra early, hoping to regain some energy by downing two cups of bitter black coffee before my first day. My stomach growled in protest; I haven’t eaten, but I made a mental note to stop for groceries on my way home—assuming I survive today.

I cleaned the living room the best I could with such little time, closing the doors so Midnight couldn’t escape, leaving her in a room where she’ll be safe for the day.

As I continue driving, the road becomes more remote, winding through thick forests and up into the hills. Then, through my fuzzy vision, I catch a glimpse of something looming ahead and the moment I make sense of it, my breath hitches.

There it is: *Sacred Heights Asylum.*

It’s not sleek or modern—no, this is like something out of a horror movie. Its stone facade is dark and striking, with narrow, barred windows. The building itself is enormous, sprawling out with wings on either side. The architecture is gothic, crumbling in some places, with distorted gargoyles leering from the corners of the roof. Twisting ivy climbs up the sides, suffocating the exterior, and the entire structure is shrouded in shadow, even in the pale morning light.

The iron gates in front of me are just as sinister, tall, and crowned with barbed wire that spirals menacingly above. I pull up to the gate and lower my window to press the intercom button. As I wait for a response, I can’t shake the growing dread settling in my gut.

Sacred Heights feels less like a standard asylum and more like a maximum-security prison. And here I am, about to walk straight into it.

But I remind myself why I’m here in the first place. It’s not just about my dad, although that was a trigger point. I’ve always been interested in the

complexities of the human mind—how mental health weaves itself through our experiences, shaping them into something uniquely ours. What fascinates me most is that hidden corner we all have, that secret place in our mind no one else could ever reach or truly understand. It belongs to us alone, and that's okay.

Still, I guess it's strange that I've chosen a career where I'm supposed to gently coax people back toward society's carefully constructed version of normality. The irony isn't lost on me.

But what's normality?

In my eyes, we all have the right to live uniquely, but there's a fine line between being different and having darker instincts that make you want to hurt others, whether that's physically or mentally. It's a point where someone's mind isn't just of imagination or fantasy, but of real-life hatred, revenge, or even violence and that's where I feel I'd like to help.

Society tends to silence those who don't comply, forcing everyone into the same perfect bubble, where people who are different are suppressed, or have to pretend to be something they're not. We've created a system that orders obedience and strict rules. And if anyone doesn't toe the line? They're labelled crazy or worse.

I have empathy for those who are struggling. There's always a reason behind someone's actions, a cause behind their pain, no matter how long they've been lost in their nightmare. I don't believe anyone is born malicious; I believe something inside them was broken or consumed along the way.

After telling the woman on the other side of the intercom my name and reasons of being here, the gates finally creak open. I drive through slowly, my tires cracking over the rocky gravel beneath it as I make my way up a long driveway.

When I pull up and cut the engine, I reach over, grabbing the handle of my briefcase and then step out of the car. Closing the door behind me, the wind sweeps through my long, red hair, carrying chilling whispers in my ears. I take a glance around, noticing the few armed officers on the property, standing in the corners. I draw a deep breath, readying myself, then take slow steps toward the towering oak door entrance of the asylum.

As I approach, the door squeaks open unexpectedly, revealing an older gentleman with grey hair and stubble, dressed in a white shirt with black pants. His warm, friendly smile feels out of place against the backdrop of the eerie building. I come to a halt in front of him, and he extends his hand, which I accept.

“You must be Raven Tate,” he says, his eyes briefly scrutinizing me before softening.

“That's right,” I respond. “And you are?”

“Dr Moss. We spoke on the phone,” he replies with a nod. “It’s nice to finally meet you. Welcome to Sacred Heights Asylum.”

His tone is welcoming, but there’s an underlying heaviness to his words, a subtle reminder of the seriousness of the place I’m about to enter. He steps aside, gesturing with a sweep of his arm for me to go first and I brush past him.

As the door shuts behind us with an echoing thud, I take in the surroundings. The interior is far simpler than I expected, almost clinical, but with a haunting charm. The high-vaulted ceilings loom overhead. Dark, ancient wood panels line the white walls, their edges worn and weathered by time.

The air smells heavy of disinfectant, but underneath that lies another scent—faint, yet unmistakable. A metallic hint, like old blood, or maybe rusted metal.

Ahead of me stretches a long, narrow hallway and along the walls, antique paintings hang in neat rows, each one showing grim-faced individuals, possibly old patients, their eyes fixed on me, tracking my every move.

Dr Moss watches me take it all in, his unchanging smile the complete opposite to the gloom of this place.

“Quite the place, isn’t it?” he murmurs softly, as if he can sense the discomfort stirring inside me. “It can be quite overwhelming at first, but you’ll get used to it.”

I glance up at him, knowing this is only my first day and despite the unease, he’s right.

“So, you’re from Boston, and you came all this way?” Dr Moss questions as we slowly continue down the hall.

I smile and give a slight nod. “That’s right. I couldn’t pass up the opportunity. I’ve heard great things about SHA and how well the patients are treated here.”

He returns my smile, though something flickers in his dark eyes—pride, perhaps, or maybe something deeper, more guarded. As we enter what I assume is his office, he gently swings the door shut behind us.

“Please, take a seat, Ms Tate,” he says, gesturing to a chair in front of his massive oak desk.

I settle opposite him, the rich leather creaking softly beneath me. His office is big, with shelves crammed with medical texts, journals, and file cabinets. Dr Moss takes his seat on the other side, resting his elbows on the desk.

“That must have been quite the journey,” he continues. “Are you staying in Morbid Crypt?”

I nod as I place my briefcase down on the floor beside me. “Yes, I found a place to rent for the next month. Do you live nearby?”

He shakes his head, chuckling softly. “No, I live about an hour away. I travel here each day and have done for many years.”

I offer a polite smile, and he clears his throat before continuing to probe me, “So, you’re a student therapist?” he asks. “I’ve reviewed your documents, and I must say, you’re doing an excellent job for someone your age. Things can only get better from here.”

My eyes soften. “Thank you very much, Dr Moss. That means a lot to me.”

He leans back, folding his hands on the desk in front of him, the faintest hint of pride in his eyes. “Alright. Have you researched the institute’s history as requested? And do you understand the types of patients we care for here?”

I nod confidently before answering. “Yes, I’m well aware. I’ve done extensive research into Sacred Heights’ history.”

“Good,” he replies, nodding sharply. “I believe it’s only fair that you start on the ground floor and work your way up in due time.”

I furrow my brows slightly, uncertainty crossing my mind at the mention of ‘working my way up.’ He notices and leans forward, his voice taking on a gentler, reassuring tone.

“Please, forgive me. You’re unfamiliar with our internal method here.”

He gestures toward the ceiling, then downwards, as if mapping out the entire facility in the air. “There are floors here. The patients on the lowest floor are those soon to be released. They’ve made incredible progress and are preparing to re-enter society.”

I nod slowly, listening intently as he carries on. “Those in the middle,” he says, his expression darkening just a touch, “are showing growth, but they’re not quite there yet. They need more time. More therapy. More medication.”

His gaze sharpens as he explains the top level. “And, of course, the highest floor is where our most severely mentally ill patients reside. They’re the ones who require the most attention, the most care. The more progress they make, the lower we bring them down. It’s a step-by-step process until they’re ready to face the world as reformed individuals.”

A small smile forms on my lips as I process what he’s saying. “I think you have a fantastic system here, Dr Moss. It shows patience... the lower they descend from their darkness, the closer they get to walking through the door into the light.”

Dr Moss’s face brightens with a large smile, clearly pleased with my understanding and he points at me. “That’s exactly right, Raven. You’ve got it.”

His approval fills me with a sense of satisfaction, but also a deeper realization of the gravity of the work I’m about to take on here. I watch Dr Moss’s every move as he stands and walks toward a tall, metal file cabinet in the corner of the room. His demeanor shifts slightly, becoming more focused and professional.

“I have a patient I’d like you to work with today,” he suggests, pulling out a manila folder from one of the drawers. “His name is Ty, and he’s convicted of double-homicide.”

His words settle between us as he turns back around, the file clasped firmly in his hands as he sits down opposite me again. I adjust in my seat, putting on my serious face as I prepare to dive into whatever this file has hidden inside.

“He’s been here for many years,” Dr Moss continues, his words steady, “and he’s set to be released in just a few days.”

He reaches over the desk, offering me the file and I lean forward, accepting it with a nod before settling back into my chair, my fingers hesitating on the folder’s edges.

“Take a look,” he encourages, watching me intently. “Tell me what you think.”

I briefly meet his eyes before lowering my gaze to the file. Slowly, I open it, the papers inside slightly worn from years of handling.

The first page reveals the basics. “Ty Easton,” I murmur faintly to myself, “twenty-eight years old.”

Ty was only thirteen years old when he committed the heartless act that would outline the course of his entire life—murdering both of his parents in cold blood with an axe. The brutality of the crime shocked not only his community but the entire region. Given his age and the horrific nature of the incident, there were countless questions surrounding his mental state.

When his trial began, it became clear that this was not a case for a typical juvenile court. Ty was ruled legally insane, his mind fractured in ways that no one fully understood at the time. Rather than sending him to prison, the court ordered him to be transferred to Sacred Heights Asylum, where he would remain indefinitely until he was deemed sane enough to face the outside world again.

And now, after fifteen years inside these walls, Ty has been declared sane. There are pages and pages of psychiatric evaluations in front of me, detailing his progress, his therapy sessions, and the various medications he’s been on, also a bold diagnosis of psychopathy.

“He has a diagnosis of psychopathy?” I ask, lifting my eyes to meet Dr Moss’s gaze, trying to piece together the fragments of Ty’s past.

“Yes,” Dr Moss replies. “He was initially diagnosed with conduct disorder when he was fourteen, which later changed to psychopathy on a

mid-scale when he was eighteen. The details are in the file, but long story short, in his younger years and still now, he exhibits a complete lack of remorse or empathy—toward anything living or even dead, amongst many other traits."

I nod slightly. "And you normally house children?" I question, feeling a small unease at the thought of young kids spending their growing years here.

He shrugs his shoulders and slowly shakes his head. "There have been a few over the years," he says, his tone calm, as if discussing a mere statistic, "but no more than ten, roughly."

Returning my attention back to the file in front of me, it seems Ty's progress is impressive—almost too impressive, given his history. Thorough medication, relentless therapy sessions, and, apparently, an incredible commitment to follow the program have all contributed to his current state. Last month, the doctors from Sacred Heights even presented evidence of his sanity to the parole board, and the judge agreed to his release on conditions.

Still, something nags at me as I skim through the detailed reports. The assessments, the psychological breakthroughs—it's all there, but there's a gaping hole in the narrative.

Why did he do it?

"Was there ever a reason as to why he killed his parents?" I query, glancing up at Dr Moss again, hoping for some scrap of understanding.

He gives a small shake of his head, his expression unreadable. "No," he replies. "He's always said he doesn't remember the incident. Claims it was a total blackout."

I sigh and lean back in my chair, closing the file in front of me with a soft thud. *A blackout.* It seems too convenient, but then again, how much can we really know about the inner thoughts of a killer's mind? Maybe I'm just skeptical as it's my first day. Let's see what I think when I meet him.

"Okay," I say after a moment, trying to wrap my head around the next steps, "so he still needs therapy before being released?"

"That's correct," Dr Moss states, nodding faintly. "A few more sessions here before his release certainly won't hurt."

I nod in agreement. “I believe you’re right, Dr Moss, and I’m more than willing to work with Ty if that’s what you’d like.”

He stands, a soft smile gracing his aging features. “He’s definitely one of our calmer patients.”

I smile back, reassured by his words, though a small part of me remains suspicious. Years in a place like this can leave imprints on anyone, no matter how calm they might seem.

Dr Moss steps toward the door, his hand resting on the knob for a moment. “Let me take you to meet him,” he says.

I nod, gathering myself as we step out of his office and into the long hallway. Dr Moss escorts me through the lower-ground corridors, the air becoming cooler with each step until we reach what he mentions as the residential side of the building. It’s unsettlingly quiet, almost too quiet, and as we walk, I notice the rooms on either side, the doors heavily secured metal.

“Is this the place where the patients stay?” I ask as my eyes drift from door to door.

“That’s right, Ms Tate. The patients on this floor have their own closed rooms, which are much larger than those on the other floors. These individuals are more trusted, they have more freedom since they’re showing great progress and are being taught how to return to normalcy.”

I nod, taking in the information. The place feels sterile, controlled, as if everything here is designed to keep chaos at bay. I wonder what the top-level floor is like. It can’t be this quiet, surely. We continue walking until Dr Moss comes to a halt in front of an open door and I stop a few paces behind him, out of view.

He steps forward, poking his head through the doorway with a calm, almost fatherly tone. “How are you doing this morning, Ty?”

I can’t yet see the man in the room, but I feel a strange tension, like the atmosphere is suddenly too thick to breathe. This is the moment I meet the young man who once committed an unspeakable crime—the boy who took the lives of his parents. A mixture of interest and anxiety warps itself around me, wondering if this meeting will be as relaxed as Dr Moss tells me

—or if I'll be staring into the eyes of something far darker than I'm prepared to handle.

I don't hear a response, but given Dr Moss's nod, I assume Ty answered him silently.

"I'd like you to meet a student therapist," Dr Moss says. "She'll be giving you a few sessions before your release."

Ty says nothing, but Dr Moss doesn't seem concerned. He glances back at me with a nod, inviting me to step inside. Taking a breath, I cautiously turn the corner, adjusting my glasses.

As soon as I lift my eyes, I see him. Ty is laid out on his narrow bed, leaning against the white wall, a book in hand with one leg hanging off the edge. His entire broad frame is draped in black, from tight jeans to a dark fitted hoodie that's pulled up over his head, casting shadows across his face. He has an eerie stillness about him. His skin is warm, tanned, a harsh difference to the cold darkness that envelops him, and his longish, jet-black hair hangs just over his eyes, concealing them like a veil.

He isn't what I expected at all.

He's extremely attractive, but there's something more—a presence that fills the room, a mystery that clings to him. His features are sharp, chiseled almost, carved perfectly, with full lips that seem too soft for someone with such a violent past.

His light brown eyes seem to draw me in, those intense spheres that seem to expand ever so slightly the moment they land on me. For just a split second, I see a flicker of something behind them—surprise, maybe interest—but then it's gone, replaced by a distantness as he looks away, placing the book on top of his bedside cabinet with calm movements.

I stand in the centre of the room as he swings his long legs off the side of the bed, sitting upright, but he doesn't say a word. The way he moves, the subtle tightening of his jaw, the calculated shift in his posture shows me he's very aware of my presence, studying me, even though he refuses to make it obvious.

When Ty's eyes finally return to mine, I clutch my notepad a little closer to my chest and my heart flutters as I extend a hand toward him.

"Hey, Ty, I'm Ms Tate," I say, my words softer than I intended.

For a second, he just stares at my outstretched hand, as if considering whether or not to engage. Then, he reaches out and his hand—larger than I expected—envelops mine, the size between us clear. As his fingers close around it, a wave of sensations shoots up my arm, electric and unexpected causing my breath to stop entirely.

Ty's brow lifts slightly at my subtle reaction, a faint glimmer of amusement dancing in his gaze as if he noticed. I quickly pull my hand back, trying to compose myself, but I can feel the heat rising in my neck.

I clear my throat, averting my eyes, inwardly disciplining myself. I'm not here to be affected by him, to crush on him—I'm here to be his fucking therapist.

I straighten my spine, my notepad now more of a shield than a tool and finally look at him again. "Shall we begin?" I ask.

"If you don't mind, Ms. Tate, I'll leave you two alone to get to know each other," Dr Moss says from behind me.

I glance over my shoulder, offering a polite smile and a nod. "Thank you, Dr Moss," I reply lightly.

The door remains open as I watch him stroll away, his footsteps gradually fading. Out of the corner of my eye, I can see Ty watching me closely, his dark eyes dragging down my body, examining me with a force I'm not entirely used to. Maybe it's been a long time since he's seen a woman close to his age.

When I finally turn my full attention back to him, our gazes lock once more.

"May I take a seat?" I ask politely.

Ty tilts his head slightly toward the chair opposite him, a small gesture. I carefully take a seat, placing my notepad and pen on my lap, crossing my legs to get more comfortable.

"So, Dr Moss tells me you're being released in a few days?" I say, pushing my glasses up the bridge of my nose.

He doesn't blink as he dissects my every feature with a detached stare, as if I'm something less than human—something to be studied, rather than a therapist. It's not surprising; I don't look the part, and my lack of

experience probably radiates off me like cheap perfume. But it’s not just suspicion I sense—there’s something darker. Something predatory.

I try to remain still, refusing to prod him with forced conversation since this needs to be at his pace and trust, but the silence seems to stretch between us.

When he finally moves, it’s calm—his hands sliding down to his thighs before pushing himself upright, as if he has all the time in the world. My gaze follows his relaxed rise, and as I tilt my head back to meet his eyes, a cold shiver trickles down my spine. He takes a step toward me. Then another, and stops directly in front of me, looming like a storm on the verge of shattering.

He slowly crouches down, bringing himself to my eye level. My pulse races, the thud of my heartbeat extremely loud in my ears and my fingers tense around my notepad, the edges biting into my skin.

His gaze sweeps over every inch of my face before his head tilts, like a hunter analysing its prey and for the briefest second, I see something flash behind his eyes. Hunger? Whatever it is, it’s dangerous.

“Your glasses hide your beauty,” he finally says, his voice deep and smooth. He leans in closer, and I fight the instinct to recoil. “Show me what you look without them,” he demands.

It’s a command wrapped in velvet, seductive yet terrifying. The room suddenly feels smaller, the walls closing in as I think carefully. This isn’t part of my job, of course, and I should know better, but sometimes, you have to play the game—just enough to make them think they hold the upper hand. One little compromise, I tell myself, just to see where his mind is. To understand him before he slips back into whatever shadows he calls home.

I swallow again, harder this time, forcing my gaze away from his and toward the door. I feel a new kind of dread—the thought of someone walking in, seeing us like this, witnessing me unravel right in front of him.

“Don’t worry,” he murmurs. “I won’t tell them you were a good girl for me.”

The way he just said that hits me like a jolt, my eyes snapping back to his with a sharpness that almost hurts. His lips curl into the faintest grin, and there it is—small dimples that shouldn’t be panty wetting but somehow

are. It disarms me, and I feel the tension in my body shift into something dangerously close to surrender. For a second, I could melt into this damn chair.

Shit. Get it together, Raven. This is a psychopath, of course he's going to be unbelievably charming. It's just a shame he's extremely beautiful to look at as well.

I raise my hand, slipping my glasses from my face and rest them on my lap. When I meet his gaze again, his eyes are already sweeping over my face. First my blue eyes, then my lightly freckled nose and cheeks, until they finally settle on my lips, lingering there.

"You're like a little kitten," he remarks, his tone disturbingly even, his pupils dilating as they devour the sight of me. His face remains expressionless as his gaze starts to move down the front of my body, shameless, and unapologetic.

A shiver runs through me everywhere they reach, and before I can stop myself, I speak—anything to distract him from the way he's undressing me with his eyes. "I have a kitten, now you mention it," I say softly. "Midnight. That's her name."

As soon as the words leave my mouth, his eyes dart up to mine, and something shifts in the depths of them.. *Midnight*. I can almost feel him toying with the name in his mind, as if it feeds his fascination.

"Let me guess," he responds as he arches a perfect thick brow. "She's black."

His eyes sharpen, narrowing as if he already knows more about me than he should and I just went ahead and handed him something personal, something he could use. But he isn't wrong, she's black with big orange eyes.

"Maybe one day, I could meet her," he suggests, the words rolling off his tongue with a coldness that feels anything but innocent.

My reaction is instant, and I feel my eyes expand, betraying the shock that twists inside me. To hide it, I quickly drop my head, sliding my glasses back on and shift in my seat, clearing my throat.

"Maybe," I manage to say, forcing the word out, now desperate to end this conversation.

From the corner of my eye, I can feel him observing me, watching every twitch, every nervous fidget. He knows. He sees it. He knows he's gotten to me, and worse—I've given him the satisfaction.

"How many psychopaths have you met, Kitten?" He asks. "Are you afraid of me?"

My brows knit together as I shake my head once. "No, of course not. People don't scare me. I'm here to help. I'm here to help you."

For a moment, he just watches me, as if dismembering my every word .

"How many psychopaths have you met, Kitten?" he repeats, slower this time.

Fuck.

His pretty brown eyes bore into mine, unblinking, daring me to slip, to show weakness. He's the first psychopath I've ever met in my short career—there's no denying that. And I can feel it—feel him—swarming my mind, wrapping himself around my thoughts. But it's no time to crack. Ty's my challenge, my first real challenge, and I can't let him play with me.

Under different circumstances, I'd shoot him back a few sassy remarks, maybe roll my eyes just enough to show I'm not here to be intimidated. But this is my new job, the one I fought for, so I push down the urge, press my lips together, and remind myself that sometimes holding on is the smarter weapon. I can learn from this every step of the way.

Tucking my hair behind my ear, I meet his gaze head-on, lifting my chin with confidence. "You're the first," I admit, my voice firm. "And I'm looking forward to hearing about your progress here and your plans for the future," I add. "If you're comfortable with that, of course."

For a second, his eyes gleam with something unreadable—enjoyment, maybe. He tilts his head slightly, dismissing my words as if they were nothing more than background noise.

"You're a city girl, aren't you?" he says, his tone casual, like we're just making small talk.

I blink, caught off guard. He's completely disregarded everything I just said, effortlessly shifting the conversation back to me.

“I’m sorry, Ty. I can’t answer too many questions about my personal life. It’s…”

“But you want to know about mine, though, right?” He cuts me off and the silence that follows is stifling, my skin prickling with discomfort.

“I don’t want you here, Raven,” he finally says, each word sinking into me. “You shouldn’t be in a place like this. You’re far too…” He pauses, his dark eyes creeping down my body with a slow, almost greedy gaze. “… precious.”

My pulse jumps. *Raven*. He just said my real name. I’ve only been in this fucking room for ten minutes—how the hell does he know my name?

“Ms Tate,” I correct, my voice tight as my eyelids narrow, my professional mask slipping for just a second.

His lips twitch upward again, just enough to reveal those damn dimples again, playful and mocking before his face hardens once more, his expression darkening. “I mean it,” he warns gravely. “Stay the fuck away from here.”

“I like my job, Ty,” I reply, forcing the words out almost sternly. “This is my first day. I’m here to help you. I want to—”

“Help me? I’m fixed, remember? That’s what they all said. So why would I need help from you?”

I open my mouth, but nothing comes out. The confidence I had a few seconds ago feels fragile now. Not willing to play any more of his games, I make the decision to end this session. It’s becoming clear that maybe Ty doesn’t want a therapist—or maybe it’s just me he doesn’t want. Either way, I won’t make him talk to me in the right way.

I give him a sharp nod, my throat tightening as I drop my gaze to the notepad in my lap. My fingers move quickly, gathering it and my pen. I push my glasses up the bridge of my nose, feeling his eyes follow my every movement as I start to stand up.

“I’m sorry to have bothered you, Ty,” I say. “I understand if you don’t want me as your therapist. That’s fine. I won’t push. I wish you all the best in your future.”

“Sit your ass back down, kitten,” he orders sharply.

I freeze, halfway out of my seat, my body stiffening at the sudden order. His dominance hits me with such force that for a second, I don't move—don't breathe.

I hold my notepad tighter as I start to settle back down in the chair, the leather creaking lightly beneath me. There's a beat of silence until I glance down at him, meeting his gaze. His lips lift just enough to hint at that wicked smirk he possesses, but the darkness in his eyes masks everything else.

"What's the rush, Raven?" he asks, dragging my name out slowly, savoring the sound of it on his tongue. "We're just getting started and I'm far from finished with you."

That almost sounded like a threat, but I decide to let it slide as he slowly rises in front of me and the room feels shrunk as he towers above. Without a word, he turns his back to me, and despite myself, I can't stop my eyes from trailing up his tall frame. The way his muscles ripple beneath that tight hoodie, the way his fitted jeans hug his firm ass. He radiates a confidence I've never seen in a man before—it's magnetic.

"*Fuck*," I mutter under my breath, the word slipping out before I can stop it.

Ty freezes and my heart lurches as he sharply tilts his head just enough to catch me with a side-eye and the heat that floods my face is instant. My stomach flips as I drop my head quickly, burying myself in the safety of my notepad, opening it with shaky fingers as if it can somehow protect me from the embarrassment coursing through me.

"Say something, freckles?" he asks as he turns to face me, taking a calm seat on the edge of his bed.

"Hmm?" I hum innocently, lifting my head as if I don't know what he's talking about.

We lock eyes as he leans over and pulls open the bedside drawer. He withdraws a pack of cigarettes, and I watch, almost fascinated as he bites one out of the packet and lights it, the orange glow of the flame glinting in his eyes.

He takes a long drag, inhaling deeply, the smoke curling lazily from his lips as he exhales through his nose and the room quickly fills with the

strong scent of tobacco.

“So…” I say, breaking the silence. “Are you looking forward to getting out? Will you be visiting anyone?”

He studies me through the haze of smoke, his gaze unnervingly relaxed, as if my questions barely register.

“You’ve clearly seen my file, so you know I killed my folks fifteen years ago. That should tell you I’ve got no one in life, Raven,” he takes a short pause before he continues, “But I have plans.”

I understand and feel for him because I know how that feels, but I steer toward the positives, hopefully. “Oh, yeah, what plans do you have?”

“Many, but I’ve got a feeling they’re all about to change,” he replies, and I feel an odd, unsettling sensation in my gut.

I inhale deeply, then give a small nod. My eyes drift toward the book sitting on the cabinet, its worn black cover standing out in the room. “You like to read?” I ask, trying to latch onto something neutral.

He follows my gaze to the book before he shakes his head once. “It’s a journal.”

My brows lift in surprise. “You write?”

The idea of him—a man who killed his parents—pouring his thoughts onto paper feels… unnerving, but also so intriguing. He looks at me, his eyes squinting slightly as he takes another deep drag of his cigarette. He holds the moment before finally exhaling and shrugging carelessly.

“They said it could help,” he says. “Getting my thoughts down rather than speaking them out loud.”

“And does it help?”

Just as his lips part to answer, something from the corner of my eye catches my attention—and his. We both turn our heads toward the door to find Dr Moss standing there, watching us. For a moment, his gaze shifts between Ty and me before finally settling on mine.

“How’s it going?” he asks.

I force a small smile, giving a quick nod, though my insides feel like they’re warped with emotions. “Perfect,” I lie because really, this feels

anything but perfect, but at least Ty is starting to give me a little something to write down on this damn pad.

“That’s great, Ms. Tate,” Dr Moss replies. “Meet me in my office when you’re finished up here. There’s a couple more patients I’d like you to meet today.”

“Of course,” I respond.

I watch him leave until it’s just me and Ty again—just the two of us, alone in the thick, tense silence.

“Is there anything else I can help you with?” I question.

But he just stares at me, blankly again, offering nothing and the quiet stretches out until I realize this is it. We’re done here. I close my notepad slowly, and stand.

“It was really nice meeting you, Ty,” I say gently, trying to keep my voice even. “If I don’t see you before your release, I wish you nothing but the best.”

I begin to move toward the door, but after only a few steps, I feel a sudden grasp on my wrist—locked and firm. My heart jerks into my throat, and I whirl around, eyes wide. Ty’s no longer seated. He’s standing now, towering over me. Damn, this man has got to be around six and a half foot.

I hold my breath as my gaze travels over his firm torso. His presence is overwhelming, his body so close, too close, the heat from him seeping into my skin. I tilt my head back to meet his eyes, my chest tightening as he steps forward, closing the already small distance between us until our bodies are pressed together. I swallow hard, the movement of my throat betraying my anxiety as he leans in, ghosting over my lips.

He moves so fast I barely register it before his fingers clamp around my jaw, tilting my head sharply to the side. My entire body stiffens, instinct screaming at me to push him away, but I can’t—I’m frozen under his hold.

With his other hand, he gently brushes my hair away revealing my ear, the soft, almost tender motion a strange opposite to the strong hold on my jaw. His thumb slowly drags down the line of my jaw until it’s lingering on the edge of my tattoo behind my ear. That’s when it clicks into place—he’s seen it. That’s how he knows my name.

My small raven tattoo.

“Do you know what a raven symbolizes?” he asks, but I don’t answer.

“Evil,” he exhales, the word stabbing into me. “Death.” He pauses, his gaze darkening as he leans in close. “And here you are, like something pulled out of my darkest dreams.”

A shudder runs through me, his intentions becoming clearer every time he talks.

“Be very careful, Little Kitten,” he murmurs, the space between us shrinking until there’s none left. “I can smell your fear,” he continues, “and I fucking like it.”

The growl that rumbles from his chest makes my head spin. “And so will everyone else here,” he stops, the words dangling between us before he adds, almost as an afterthought, “But this place is the least of your worries now.”

Before I can even process what he just said, he inhales deeply, the sensation of his nose brushing against my neck sending a jolt through me and my eyes flutter shut involuntarily.

“Ty,” I whisper, his name laced with a desperate edge as I try to pull back to create some distance. But he’s faster. His hand slides to the small of my back, pressing firmly, locking me against him. There’s no breaking away, his grasp tightening just enough to remind me of the power he holds between us.

“*Fucking call for them*, Raven,” he taunts, his lips brushing the shell of my ear. “Tell them I’m touching my new therapist inappropriately. Get me locked up for another fifteen years. Save yourself from me.”

It’s like he’s daring me, as if he knows I won’t. He’s pushing me, testing me, and the worst part is—I don’t. I don’t call out, I don’t scream for help, even though I should.

He turns his head slightly and my eyes snap open just in time to catch his profile. I side-eye him but his hold on my jaw doesn’t loosen—it only clenches.

“You’re very lucky you met me confined inside this shitty place.” His bites, each word a dangerous promise. “Because this meeting between us might’ve been a very different experience if I had my freedom to say and do what I really wanted.”

His thumb slides back up my jawline, tracing the soft skin as if he's memorizing the shape of me. When it brushes over my bottom lip, he pauses and his eyes follow the movement intently, dark lashes lowering as he watches the way my lip gives under the pressure of his thumb.

"So fucking beautiful," he murmurs. "So pure and delicate," he continues, his gaze flicking back to meet mine, holding eye contact. "So ready to be tainted and shattered by me."

He looks at me like I'm something fragile—something he could break just for the satisfaction of seeing it destroyed. His thumb lingers on my bottom lip, pressing just enough to part it slightly, and I realize I've stopped breathing. Then, with a sudden movement, he releases me.

His heat dissipates from my body as I draw in a sharp breath, my chest tight as I lower my head, fiddling with my outfit. I steal one last glance at Ty, lowering my voice.

"You don't know a thing about me, Ty. Don't underestimate me. I may be a professional at work, but I'm still a normal independent woman outside of these walls that will fight any person if I have too. Don't make me regret this."

His brow lifts at my brazenness, "I won't ever underestimate you, Kitten. I think you've got exactly what it takes."

What the fuck does that even mean?

We have a silent moment of intensity, his dark eyes still burning with feral desire until I turn and leave without any more hesitations.

My heels echo sharply down the quiet hallway, each step too loud, too fast—desperate to put distance between me and that room, between me and him. I scan each door I pass, looking for a restroom until finally, I spot one opposite Dr Moss's office and yank the door open, slipping inside.

The door clicks shut behind me, and I press my forehead against the cool wood, closing my eyes. One day. One fucking day. That's all it's been, and already, Ty has dragged me so far out of my depth I can barely think straight.

I turn, facing myself in the mirror, my glasses sitting perched on top of my head. I straighten my shoulders, then reach for the tap, twisting it open

and cupping my hands under the cold water. When I splash it over my face, the chill bites into my skin, shocking me back to the present, back to reality.

Why the hell am I here? I stare at myself, water dripping from my chin, my thoughts spiraling. This was supposed to be a challenge—a chance to push myself, to grow, to help people. Maybe even help myself.

I grab a paper towel and pat my face dry, my eyes never leaving my reflection. The woman staring back at me looks fragile, but I can't afford to be that. Not here. Not now. I came into this line of work for a reason, to find the strength I've always lacked.

I'm alone in this life. That's my reality. I have no one to lean on, no one to save me but myself. It's time to stop being that girl. I need to survive. Because in this place, hesitation means weakness, and weakness is something I can't do. Not if I want to make it in this line of work. I straighten myself out one more time, but this time with purpose, my fingers tightening around the paper towel before tossing it in the bin.

Fuck this. I can do it.

After I'm done, I walk straight across the hall to Dr Moss's office, pausing before gently knocking my knuckles against the wood. A moment later, I hear his calm voice from inside.

"Come on in."

I push down the handle slowly, summoning a small, polite smile as I step inside. Dr Moss looks up from his paperwork, his brow lifting as he slips off his glasses.

"Is everything okay, Raven?" he asks.

I nod, careful not to let anything waver in my expression. "Yes, everything's fine."

His gaze remains on me for a beat longer before he gestures to the seat across from his desk. "How did you find your session with Ty?"

I let another small smile slip into place. "I believe we're making progress, but it may take a few sessions," I say smoothly with the well-rehearsed lie. *Progress.* The word echoes in my mind. *Hollow*.

Dr Moss's face relaxes, and he nods approvingly. "Good to hear. Ty's… a special case."

He leans back, observing me carefully. “I know you’re new to this but trust your instincts. He’s the kind who’ll test every part of your will power if you let him. He’s extremely smart yet slightly closed off. But if you hold strong, he’ll eventually open up.”

I nod and Dr Moss gives me a reassuring smile, his gaze softening. “Good. It sounds like you’re handling it well.” He leans forward, gathering a stack of files. “Take a few minutes, then I’d like to introduce you to another patient. Today will be a long one, I’m afraid.”

“Of course,” I reply, but my mind is already wandering back to Ty—how he found out my real name, how easily he slipped beneath my skin. His subtle threats, his mocking smile, the way he touched me, tested my boundaries, my self-control… And the worst part? I let him. I could have shut it down, told Dr Moss about every remark, each line he’d crossed. But I didn’t.

Maybe because deep down, there’s this strange pull telling me he doesn’t have much time left here. Only days until he’s free. A part of me knows I should do everything by the book, keep things professional, give Dr Moss every warning sign so he can make up his mind whether Ty should ever leave these walls. But then, what would that make me? Another name in the system that let him down, caged him when he was so close to living his life on the outside. He was only a child when he did what he did. What chance at life has he actually had? So I tell myself it’s fine to let the small things slide. Maybe that was just his bizarre way of flirting.

Facts are facts, I don’t know him at all. I don’t know his personality or whether he was just teasing. And in reality, this is only temporary. I’ll never see him again once he’s gone.

“Here’s a panic button just in case you need it, Ms Tate. Keep it on you at all times while you’re here. You can never be too sure with some of these patients,” Dr Moss asserts, snapping me out of my thoughts as he leans over his desk, handing me the small, white device. I reach over, taking it from his hand before slipping it into my pocket.

“Thank you,” I say quietly.

“Billy Wade is yet another patient on this floor and I’d like you to meet him today as well. He hasn’t been scheduled to be freed yet, but he’s

another that is making incredible improvements.” He says, handing me a file which I take and open.

As I skim through the case file, my stomach knots. Billy Wade, thirty-six. Convicted eighteen years ago for crimes so unspeakable. He had abducted two young women, chained them together, brutally abused them in ways that make the words on the page feel dark and heavy, and finally murdered them after weeks of torture. He also recorded every minute of the horrific act before selling it on the dark web. The cruel images his file paints settle into my mind, and I find myself shuddering internally.

According to these reports, Billy’s been diagnosed with psychopathy as well, yet he’s managed to show what they call “significant progress.” I remind myself that the doctors here know what they’re doing. They’ve seen this side of humanity more closely than I have, and if they think he’s progressing, it must be true.

I take a deep inhale, struggling to silence my mind. Professionalism is supposed to be my armor in situations like these. I’m here to understand, not to judge. Yet, I’m also a woman. And somewhere in the dark corner of my mind, beneath the polished therapist mask, I feel the fear, the disgust, the heartbreak for the lives he tore apart. I’m only human, but I have to walk in and engage, even if my heart hurts for those poor women.

I close the folders, stacking them neatly before pushing back from the desk with a sense of calm determination and place them down in front of Dr Moss.

“Okay, I’m ready.”

As we step out of the office, we walk side by side toward the residential wing. When we pass Ty’s open door, I peek inside briefly, but I notice he’s no longer there. I continue confidently alongside Dr Moss until we reach Billy’s room. Pausing at the doorway, I look in to see Billy reclining on his bed, a book in hand. He lifts his gaze in our direction as Dr Moss clears his throat, his dark eyes sharp and probing, but I hold my ground. I won’t let him get under my skin like Ty did. No way.

“Billy, this is Ms Tate,” Dr Moss says with a slight nod in my direction. “She’ll be leading your session today.”

Billy closes his book and sits up, eyes still locked onto me. “Of course. Ms Tate,” he says, with an almost challenging emphasis, “please, have a

seat.”

I step forward before settling into the chair opposite him and crossing one leg over the other, my notepad balanced in my lap. I catch Dr Moss’s approving nod as he leaves, keeping the door ajar. Now alone with Billy, I adjust my glasses with a calm smile and make my introduction.

“It’s so good to meet you, Billy. Let’s talk about you—tell me a bit about yourself,” I say. “What keeps you occupied?”

Billy pauses, assessing me, but I keep my expression calm. “Well,” he says slowly, testing my reaction, “there’s not much to do but read and talk to the others here.”

“Sounds like a great use of time,” I say smoothly. “Any favourite genres?”

He shrugs, his gaze narrowing. “My first choice would be horror, if they’d allow it. Otherwise, whatever they’ve got in the library.” He lets out a low chuckle, his bright yellow teeth showing just a little.

I smile slightly before I continue, “Have you thought about what you’d like to do once you’re out?”

He nods, shifting as he studies me. “Yeah, I’ve got family—my momma, an aunt, cousins…” His gaze narrows, gauging my reaction. “And my girl.”

I keep my expression neutral as I look up, surprised but relaxed. “You have a girlfriend? I’m sure she’s looking forward to seeing you.”

His smile widens, as if he's savouring some private triumph. “Of course, I have a girlfriend. She’s stood by me through everything. She knows I didn’t mean to do what I did—I wasn’t myself.”

A chill works its way up my spine, but I keep my face neutral, nodding as I jot down his words. “I’m glad you’ve had support through all this, Billy,” I reply, measuring each word. “That can make a real difference.”

Billy’s smile stretches, eyes fixed on mine. “I don’t know where I’d be without them,” he says, voice strangely flat. “I’m a reformed man now, Ms Tate. I’ll be out of here in no time.”

I nod thoughtfully, holding his gaze for a moment longer before shifting in my seat. We speak for a while longer, getting to know him and all about

his plans when or if he leaves this place, then I think it's time to move onto the next patient.

"Is there anything you need from me?" I offer, voice steady. "I'm here to help, anytime you need."

He shakes his head, gaze shadowed. "Not today, Ms Tate," he murmurs. "But I'm sure I'll see you again."

When he leans back, the glint in his eyes is as unreadable as it is unsettling. But I remind myself to stay firm and wrap up our session with a smile. "Thank you for talking with me today, Billy. I appreciate it."

Billy watches me wordlessly as I exit, his eyes following every step until I'm around the corner. Exhaling, I feel the anxiety of the encounter settle in as I head down the corridor.

I spot a nurse wheeling a medication trolley and approach her with a polite nod. "Hi, I'm Ms Tate," I say, introducing myself with a warm smile. "A new therapist here. I'd like to get to know the patients a bit better—would it be alright if I tag along?"

The nurse, Cathy from what I see one her name tag, gives a small nod, her expression impassive. "Sure." She agrees gravely.

I fall behind her as she continues her rounds, watching as she distributes small pots of medication to each patient. When we reach Ty's door, I hang back, observing him through the cracked door as he takes his pills, even opening his mouth to show Cathy he's swallowed. She moves on, satisfied, and I keep pace, but something makes me look back.

Ty spits the pills into his hand before his dark gaze suddenly snap up to meet mine at the doorway. We lock eyes, and a silent understanding simmers between us. I know I should say something, again, report it even—but instead, I simply let my eyes linger before turning and following the nurse down the hall, leaving Ty to his secret.

Here I go again.

As I catch up to Cathy, I glance back, just once, over my shoulder. Ty stands in his doorway, checking out my ass, also watching and probably waiting to see if I'll deceive him. I turn away, pulse quickening, unsure why I'm keeping quiet. *Fuck.*

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CHAPTER TWO

Ty

I blink blankly, tracing the last place she stood like I could burn her perfect outline into my mind. Kitten thinks she’s clever, moving in close enough to feel my sharp edges but staying just far enough that I can’t close in on her yet. Which is frustrating the hell out of me. This fucking asylum is holding me back from everything I want to do. But I can’t tell if she’s feeding my fascination deliberately or just clueless enough to walk straight into my darkness.

Every time she covers for me, it feeds the itch—stokes it into a fucking inferno. She doesn't realize she's throwing gasoline on the fire every time she looks the other way. I want more of her. I want her skin under my hands, her screams in my ear, her mind spinning while I fuck her beneath me. Only then will she ever truly understand what a psychopath is. She thinks she’s all careful and professional, but she’s clueless about what she’s inviting. With a mind like this, there is no outsmarting me.

I’ll fucking break her physically and mentally. I’ll enjoy it while doing so.

Raven ruined every plan I had the second she walked through that door. Hell, now she’s my plan. When I get out of here, she’ll be mine. She’s already wrapped up in this game, yet she thinks she's safe with her neat little boundaries and walls. She believes her job is her territory, but she doesn’t see the cage she’s walking into, and I can’t fucking wait to trap my beautiful little kitten.

She’s the opposite of everything I am—soft, light, and too clean to touch me. The way her cheeks flush, the way her voice cracks when she talks to me, trying so hard to stay calm even though I can practically feel her fucking pulse quicken when I look at her. She’s got no idea what I’d do to her, what it would be like if I wasn’t putting on this mask just for the sake

of getting out of this dump. Out there, no walls, no one to hear her screams? She'd crumble under me. And shit, the image in my sick mind is the most addictive one I've ever had.

She actually said she'd help me. She really believes that. People have tried for years, people more experienced, more prepared to take on an insane bastard like me, but none of them lasted. I don't change; I get what the fuck I want. End of story. But I play good boy. Do as I'm told. These people are so fucking pathetic and foolish.

And her?

She's just stupidly baiting me to play the game, walk free, and finish what I set in motion long before she entered my orbit.

Suddenly Billy, the dickhead a couple of doors from opposite mine, pops his head out of his door, looking down the corridor. My eyes narrow at him, wondering what the fuck he's doing. I'm not the only one playing games in this asylum. He's doing a pretty good job at manipulating the system too, but he's not someone who should be released. Ever. Fucking rapist scumbag cunt is lucky I ain't cut his fucking head off already. I don't engage with patients, I never have, although they have tried to speak to me. I may be completely unhinged inside my head, but I'm not a fucking idiot.

The top floor in this place is the only time that's really tested me here. The patients on that floor are literally out of their mind, like zoned out zombies, dribbling and walking around in fucking straightjackets, sleeping in padded cells. Rapes and murders happen a lot up there. Even to staff and that's exactly why I can't have my kitten here. She's an easy target.

Billy suddenly turns his head, looking straight into my eyes. A big smile spreads across his ugly face, but I remain solemn.

"Hey, have you seen that new therapist? Damn," he says, low and filthy, his gaze sliding down the hallway the way Kitten went like a bloodhound.

I watch as his eyes darken into a predatory gaze, his tongue sneaking out to wet his dry, cracked lips. My jaw sets tight, possessiveness creeping over me like a white-hot rage, almost making me storm over there and twist his fucking neck until it pops, protecting Raven and all the innocents on this earth.

She doesn’t belong anywhere near him. Or me, for that matter. I’m not innocent, not by a long shot. Maybe I’m even a fucking hypocrite for feeling this territorial pull over her. But some monsters don’t even deserve to inhale the same fucking air as the rest of us.

Hold of a little longer, Ty. I tell myself. Don’t lose sight now.

As soon as Billy steps out, heading down the corridor after Raven, my instincts flare, his intensions radiating from him. My teeth bite down as I watch his hulking frame disappear, every muscle in me primed. Without wasting a second, I storm back into my room and move straight to the small bedside table. Dropping to a crouch, I yank open the drawer, glancing over my shoulder to make sure no one’s watching.

My fingers push the contents inside aside until I hit the hidden compartment at the back. With the tip of a pen, I carefully wedge under a thin piece of broken wood, prying it open to reveal the sliver of a razor blade nestled under it. My hand pauses, hovering over it as a question flickers in the back of my mind—am I ready to risk it all for her? But that thought dissolves almost instantly, swallowed up by something darker.

An obsession I can’t seem to control.

My fingers curl around the blade, slipping it into my pocket. With that icy steel tucked against me, I rise, take one last look around, then step back into the hallway, heading in their direction, my pulse steady, my focus sharp and murderous.

…

The hallways start to dim as evening settles in. It’s deserted now—always is at this time. The staff shift change leaves a stillness, the night crew gathering with the day staff in the lounge, sipping tea and probably swapping gossip. Only about ten of us patients roam this floor, and it’s quiet, too quiet, almost like it’s waiting for something deadly to happen.

I move through the shadows, every part of me on edge, slipping past each camera, keeping to the blind spots I know by heart. I’ve memorized it all: where every camera turns, the patterns, the cracks in this place’s security.

As I creep past a janitor’s cupboard that’s very near the staff room, I hear a muffled whimper coming from behind the door. I pause, stopping in my

tracks, my instincts screaming at me. I turn my head, side-eying the door, listening intently until I hear more rustling and hushed sounds. I turn calmly and take a few steps toward it, my hand finding the cold, metal handle. I gently push down and slowly open it.

That’s when I see it.

Billy struggling with a woman on the floor beneath him. My angry eyes sweep down his back, his huge body consuming her and between her legs. I quietly enter, digging into my pocket before closing the door behind me. They don’t notice I’m here. As my wide eyes assess the situation, I creep forward, bit by bit noticing who the fuck he’s trying to rape.

Kitten.

Her legs kick against the ground, heels scraping uselessly, her face hidden beneath his huge hand, her voice swallowed in muffled cries.

His other hand fumbles with his belt and she’s struggling with everything she has, clawing at his face. But he’s no match to her size. I notice her ripped panties not too far away and her panic button across the room just as I stop behind them. Anger surges through me like the last time I killed, the darkness seeping through my veins.

With the razor blade between my fingers, I lean over grabbing his dark hair and forcefully yanking it back, making his neck cracking from the sharp movement. My eyes collide with Raven’s. Red, raw, wet, and filled with pure fear. My hot blood runs cold for a second just as Billy reaches up to grab my hand.

“Shh, my little kitten,” I whisper coldly, my eyes glazed over.

I press the sharp razors edge to his throat and without a second thought, I swiftly slice across it. His blood sprays all over Raven instantly, but she doesn’t make a sound. Her body shakes as she covers her face with her hands. The sight of all the blood does something to me. Something dangerous. Pulling me back to that day, fifteen years ago. I hold his hair tightly, his gurling starting to fade as he tries to hold his open throat.

When Billy's lifeless form slumps fully, I rip him off her, his heavy body rolling to the side with a final thud. Raven immediately scrambles back, her eyes wild and desperate as she pushes against the wall, her gasps shuddering out, her gaze locked on the corpse lying between us. My own

inhalation is heavy, syncing with hers in an almost eerie rhythm, and when her gaze finally lifts from Billy to meet mine, we hold that raw, electrified moment.

I step forward slowly, carefully moving around the pool of blood, and she curls inward, wary of me, her whole-body trembling in the aftermath. I kneel in front of her, my eyes tracing over her face. She's somehow even more beautiful with fear woven into every line of her expression.

My gaze drifts downward to her torn shirt, hanging off her shoulder and revealing the curve of her black lace bra beneath, a hint of her pink nipple peeking through the thin fabric. I can't deny it: she's mesmerizing like this. She sees the feral look in my eyes and immediately raises her hands to cover herself.

My fingers twitch with the urge to touch, the sight of her drenched in that dark red liquid pulling me to the edge of losing control, my obsession growing tighter. I've always had a thing for blood, but this… This is something fucking else entirely.

Without warning, something in me snaps. My hands reach out faster than any thought, seizing the small of her waist harshly and yanking her toward me in one swift motion. The sound she makes—a sharp, startled squeak—cuts through the small room. Her hands fly up, slamming into my chest in a desperate bid to stop me.

"Ty!" she hisses, her quiet tone trembling.

Her reaction hits me like a shockwave, and I freeze. Then my eyes widen as the reality of what I'm doing slams into me and my hands pull back as if they're burned.

She moves slowly and cautiously as she presses herself back against the wall again. Her hands tremble slightly, but her eyes remain steady, watching me with the kind of fear that feels like a scalpel cutting into me, dissecting my every move. Is she afraid? Curious? Or something in between? I can't tell, and the not-knowing coils in my chest like barbed fucking wire. This isn't me. Not usually. I'm the one who's always in control, always scheming, keeping the crazy locked beneath the surface. But the sight of her—her skin streaked with blood, her hair matted and wild—did something to me. It struck a match against the darkest parts of me, igniting something primal, something I can't name but can't suppress.

“You… you saved me…” she whispers, dragging me out of my thoughts, her voice barely clear over the intense rasp of her breath. Tears carve pale tracks through the blood on her cheeks, and I reach out again, but this time slowly, wanting to touch her in a gentle way, but she flinches back, pressing further into the wall.

“Don’t… don’t touch me,” she mutters. “This… this is a crime scene. You need to go, Ty.”

My brow furrows as I watch her yank off her shirt, her tits jiggling with each movement. She gets on her knees in front of me, her eyes darting between me and Billy’s corpse. But instead of running for her life, she edges closer until I can feel her body heat on mine.

I stare at her carefully as she spits onto a small white bloodless patch of her shirt, then raises it to my face. Her trembling hand dabs away the specks of blood I hadn’t even realized were there. Her touch is so soft that it throws me off. A strange heat spreading to the icy parts of my soul. Every second that ticks by, I gaze at her face, allowing her to wipe away the traces of the murder I just committed, gradually becoming my partner in crime.

Her gaze meets mine now and then until she pauses with the fabric hovering over my skin.

“Why’d you do that? You could have just knocked him out or something.” she asks, her eyes dropping to my lips with an intensity that almost makes my dick hard.

I lift a brow, the act more than natural to me, but even more so now when it comes to her.

“That isn’t even a fraction of what I’d do for you, kitten. He had his hands on what’s fucking mine.

She remains still, mauling over what I just said, thinking carefully until she finally answers.

“Yours?” she breathes out. “I’m not yours, Ty.”

I don’t say anything back. She can think what the fuck she wants for now, but she’ll see in time just how mine she is.

She carefully holds her shaky hand out and my gaze drifts to it.

“Give me the razor blade and go.” My eyes flash to hers and she continues sternly, “I owe you.”

She’s covering for me again. Even after murder?

“Please…” she pleads, her watery eyes scanning mine.

I inhale deeply, lifting my hand and placing the blade in the centre of her palm. She springs into action instantly, rubbing the blade with her shirt, getting rid of my fingerprints. When she stands, I do too, watching as she walks over to billy, pressing it to his fingertips then dropping it and her shirt onto the blood-soaked floor.

Then she leans over, reaching for her panic button and she turns to face me. She looks at me expectantly, waiting for me to follow her orders, her thumb hovering over the button. I take one last look at Billy, then her before I turn around and leave.

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CHAPTER THREE

Raven

The lights in Dr Moss’s office are too bright, harsh against my heavy, sore eyelids. My body is covered by the scratchy grey blanket they gave me, but it does nothing to soothe the lingering pressure I feel across my skin, the remnants of Billy's disgusting touch, the phantom weight of his body, the smell of his stinking hand smothering me. I can still feel it pushing against my face, and the nausea surges back up, violent and thick in my throat.

I keep my head low, arms wrapped around myself tightly as if I could squeeze the memories right out of me. Then, I catch a glimpse of the hallway through the open door. They’re wheeling Billy’s body away in a thick black bag, his form barely visible through the zipped plastic. The sight should bring relief, but instead, a shiver runs through me, cold and relentless.

I lied to the cops and made up a story. I told them I somehow got that razor blade off Billy and defended myself. Given his history, they didn’t seem interested in trying to see if I was lying. They just took my word for it and left me alone. I have no doubt in my mind it’s now a closed case with how sympathetic they were.

I couldn’t let them punish Ty. Not after what he did. Not after he saved me. He hadn’t hesitated, hadn’t held back. He’d done what had to be done, what I couldn’t do, and even now, with his voice echoing in my mind, calm as he whispered to me in that janitor’s closet, I feel unsettled.

“*He had his hands on what’s mine.*” The words replay, dark and possessive, and they settle over me with a strange comfort I can’t seem to shake.

But that’s not why I lied. I lied because, if he hadn’t been there, if his timing had been even a second off… I close my eyes, squeezing them tight.

I would have been broken, maybe even dead. Ty had saved my life. And though he’s as dangerous as anyone else in this place—maybe even more so—he’d come through for me in a way no one else would have in my life.

The tension in my body is interrupted by a soft voice. “Ms. Tate?”

Dr Moss is standing at the threshold. I can feel him studying me carefully as if he’s afraid I might crumble right here on the chair. I slowly lift my head to meet his gaze, summoning whatever remains of my strength.

“I’m sorry you went through all that on your first day, Raven. This has never happened before on this floor,” he says, but I don’t answer. “I think you should take a couple of days off.”

My eyes snap upward to his and I shake my head. “No. Please. I’m fine...”

His cocks to the side as he observes me, but my gaze never weavers. I need him to see I’m not only ready for this, but also, I know I need to see Ty before he leaves. I’ve got things to say, things to lay down. I can’t just sit in that depressive house and replay everything over in my head repeatedly, it will send me on a downward spiral.

“Are you sure? I don’t want…”

“I’m absolutely sure.” I cut him off firmly.

He inhales sharply, slipping his hands into his pants pockets then gives a sharp nod.

“Okay,” he agrees, and my body relaxes. “I guess you should head home now and get some sleep. You look exhausted.”

I nod in agreement, gently standing on my aching legs. With the blanket still wrapped around me. I lift my briefcase and head toward the door. As I enter the hallway, I glance back, seeing Ty’s door is now closed, the light dim. I inhale a shaky breath, then exit Sacred Heights.

…

The next morning, as dawn’s first light seeps through the windows, I pour Midnight's food and watch her devour it, purring low and constant as I run my hand along her sleek fur.

“I’ll see you later, baby girl,” I murmur, scratching just behind her ears where she likes it best. She doesn’t look up, fully absorbed.

With a final glance around the house, I gather my briefcase and step out, feeling the cold air hit me like an icy wave. I lock the door, hearing the creak of old wood and metal, and head down the steps. There's a strange hush outside, a mist blanketing the quiet street. Sacred Heights still settles heavily in my mind, like a dark spot I can't rub out, but the coldness, the fog—they fit the heaviness that hasn't lifted since last night. I pull the car door open and toss my briefcase onto the passenger seat with a huff.

Just as I get ready to settle in, a pair of voices catch my attention. Turning my head, I see a couple emerging from a house not far from mine, laughter bubbling between them, the man's arm slung around her shoulders. They're walking toward me, his hand resting protectively on her and I force a smile as the woman waves.

"Hey!" she calls, her voice bright; cutting through the chilly silence and I pause, trying to match her warmth.

"Hey," I answer back, feeling the forced cheer slip into place.

They're close now, and I see they're both attractive—like a magazine ad, although older than me. The man, with curious eyes, studies me.

"Just moved in?" he asks.

I shake my head and glance over at my broken-down little house, its chipped paint and wrecked porch, the opposite to the suburban beauty of the other homes I'm used to.

"No. I'm just here for work experience at Sacred Heights for the next month."

The man's expression shifts to something between horror and intrigue, his brows rising. "Jesus fucking Christ," he mutters, half in admiration, half in disbelief. "You're brave. I heard messed-up stories about that place growing up."

I manage a smile, thin and polite. "You grew up here?" I ask, my gaze flicking between them.

He nods. "I did. My mom's been next door forever." He looks down at the woman, and she smiles up at him, her expression lit with some secret, shared moment. "We're just visiting, but we don't live too far from here," he explains.

The woman’s gaze swings back to me, bright and inviting, completely changing the subject.

“Hey, why don’t you come out with us tonight? There’s this little bar down the road.” She gestures through the mist where all I can see is a blur of streetlights and a few houses.

“Oh, I don’t know,” I start, caught off guard, still feeling last night all over me. I’m not sure if a night out is what I need—or want.

“Come on,” she insists, her tone persuasive and warm. “It’ll be fun!”

I hesitate, looking at their eager faces before I give in with a small nod. Maybe a few drinks wouldn’t hurt, just enough to get them off my back for now. I don’t have the energy to keep going back and forth.

“Sure,” I say, exhaling slowly.

They exchange a grin, her eyes lighting up. “We’ll knock around seven?” she says, pacing back with him, still holding onto his arm.

“Yeah,” I nod again before observing them walk away, her laughter echoing faintly as they disappear back into the haze.

Finally alone, I slide into my car, letting the quiet settle around me again.

…

As I drive through the iron gates of Sacred Heights, last night clings to me like a deathly shadow I can’t shake. The way I’d scrubbed my skin until it was red raw, desperate to get rid of Billy’s scent, and yet it still seems to be there, haunting thought.

I felt each sleepless hour echo in my bones, the sexual assault playing over and over like a twisted fucking film reel. The way he touched me intimately. His cubby fingers wrapping around my panties as he ripped them off me. How I felt him between my legs.

And I was alone dealing with it all. Only Midnight was there, her warm presence the closest thing to support I could find. But it wasn’t enough—not really. In all honesty, all I wanted was a simple hug, someone to tell me I’ll be okay. But I guess, I need to just realize that this is my life. For now, I’m alone and I have to deal with things like this, alone.

As I pull up to the grim old building, its towering shape barely visible, I cut the engine and let out a slow exhale. I tell myself it’ll be worth it, all

this—the fear, the disgust, the exhaustion. It has to be. But I've got some things to say to Dr Moss today. No matter where I am in the building, even on the lowest floor, this place needs better security. There's no room for mistake in a place like this. It's far too risky for patients and staff.

Gripping my briefcase with determination, I step out of the car, locking it with a firm click. The fog wraps around me, swallowing each step as I cross the gravel, every crunch underfoot sharp against the creepy quiet. Reaching the entrance, I nod to the guard, who waves me through without hesitation.

As I enter the Asylum, closing the heavy door behind me, I'm immediately met by the chaos of frantic shouts and hurried footsteps booming down the hall. Doctors and nurses swarm around a patient, their faces fixed with concentration and caution. My brow furrows, curiosity and unease nudging me forward as I try to make sense of the situation.

"You fucking bastards!" The young woman shouts, hoarse and trembling with anger. "You've already taken so much from me, and you still keep me here to do it! I remember everything—you can't erase any of it!"

The patient is someone I don't recognize, her face pale with terror. In her grasp, she clutches a metal bar, her knuckles white around it. I don't fully understand what she means—maybe she's caught in some kind of delusion. Whatever it is, her pain feels very real.

"You can't fucking keep me here to play your sick games! I'm not an experiment! I'm a human!"

She swings the metal bar wildly, her fury spiralling out of control, but Dr Moss takes a cautious step forward, speaking gently, his voice low and calm, yet I can't hear what he said.

The woman's response is a bloodcurdling scream as she lashes out, nearly catching him with the bar. In an instant, a male doctor slips behind her, wrapping his arms around her tightly, and with the coordinated movements of a team that's done this before, they restrain her. The struggle only ends as they give her a sedative and her cries slowly fade into silence as her body finally goes limp.

I stand at a distance, watching as they lift her, her now-sleeping form swinging between them. A pang of sympathy knots in my chest; seeing someone so lost, so much heartache, is harder than I thought.

As the hallway clears, Dr Moss lets out a sigh, visibly defeated, and turns to approach me.

“Ah, Raven,” he says with a strained smile. “Great to see you here. It’s already been a bit of a morning.”

“Yeah, I could see that,” I reply, nodding as he gestures for me to follow him into his office. Inside, he lets the tension seep out, running a hand across his brow with a slow, tired shake of his head.

“It seems one of my more promising patients has had a relapse. This week is already turning out to be… quite something,” he says, looking down, as if trying to gather his thoughts.

I settle into the chair opposite him as he takes a seat. “It’s hard to see, but I suppose it’s a reminder that recovery is never a straight line. It’s a learning curve for everyone, I guess, and maybe it’s a step closer to her recovery,” I assure him.

When he doesn’t respond, his silence heavy and his eyes distant, I decide to press him over the concerns that have been gnawing at me since yesterday. Clearing my throat, I straighten my posture and speak, keeping my tone firm.

“Dr Moss, I’d like to discuss the security on the lower floor.”

His gaze sharpens as it snaps to mine, his body stiffening slightly as he adjusts in his chair.

“I feel it should be increased—just a little, at least,” I continue. “It’s clearly not safe for patients or staff. I understand the intention behind giving the patients more leniency, especially down here, but I think after yesterday... well, it’s fair to say that anything can happen, no matter what floor we’re on.”

His expression remains unreadable for a beat too long, the silence stretching uncomfortably. Then, finally, he inhales deeply, his chest rising.

“Of course, Ms Tate.”

His gaze lingers on me for a moment longer than necessary, and the heaviness of it sends a strange shiver down my spine.

“I’ll take your insight—and your unfortunate experience—into serious consideration. I’ll have a word with our security team.”

The sharp nod he gives is final, almost too much so, as if he's trying to close the conversation before it can deepen, but I feel my shoulders relax, knowing someone might not go through what I did last night.

His face softens suddenly, then he leans forward, as if about to deliver some long-awaited good news.

"On a positive note, it's Ty's release day."

My eyebrows lift in surprise, my heart skipping a beat. "Today?" I repeat, trying to keep my true feelings at bay.

He nods, an unmistakable satisfaction brightening his expression. "Yes. His paperwork came through early, and he'll be leaving within the next few hours."

I inhale deeply, letting myself settle back into the chair. It all seems so soon.

"You've done amazing work with him, Dr Moss. Truly."

I can't ignore the need to see Ty one last time, to clear the air, even if only for my own peace of mind. I shift forward in my seat, catching Dr Moss's attention. "Would it be possible for me to have one last session with him before he goes? Just to touch base and maybe gauge how he's feeling as he heads out?"

His eyes flicker with interest, and he gives a slight nod. "That's a fantastic idea, Raven. He's in his room gathering his things."

Thanking him, I rise quickly, leaving the office and heading down the long corridor toward Ty's room. Each step feels heavier as I get closer, the usual confidence I wear slipping away, replaced by a nervousness that's already starting to twist in my stomach.

I stop a step away from his open door, pushing my glasses further up my nose and I look down at myself, adjusting my outfit.

"Mine."

His words from last night echo in my mind once again until I draw a deep inhale and edge forward.

I notice him straight away, dressed in tight, ripped black jeans, a fitted hoodie with the hood drawn up, his boots dark and scuffed, a cigarette

hanging loosely between his lips as he casually shoves his things into a backpack.

I raise my fist, ready to knock on his door, thinking he hasn't spotted me yet. But before I even make contact, he speaks, the cigarette still balanced between his lips.

"Get your pretty ass in here, freckles."

My eyes expand, feeling like my feet have been suddenly cemented to the ground. I stare and he turns his head just enough to glance at me. His dark eyes are partially hidden by his hood and his black hair that falls messily over his forehead, but it doesn't stop them searing straight through me.

His gaze trails over me before he stands upright, then moves toward me with a casual, controlled pace, each step radiating a calm dominance that somehow feels both dangerous and magnetic, setting my heart pounding hard against my ribs.

In this moment, I can't help but think he's the most fascinating man I've ever seen—a picture of darkness, rebellion, and domination, cloaked in a raw, unapologetic allure that makes him impossible to ignore. He doesn't just look like trouble; he's the very definition of it. But I find myself drawn in anyway, feeling the danger only makes the pull stronger, as if red flags were suddenly my favourite colour.

He halts a few steps away, pulling the cigarette from his lips, eyes narrowing as he takes me in. Before I even register it, he lunges forward, catching my wrist, and pulls me into the room with a swift yank.

I stumble slightly, brushing my red hair out of my face as I watch him shut the door behind me, locking the world out. The walls close in as he turns, advancing with intensity, until I instinctively back up, only to feel the wall against my shoulders. There's nowhere else to go.

He braces his arm against the wall above me, trapping me beneath his gaze, his tall frame eclipsing the light as he speaks, low and unwavering.

"I thought I told you not to come back here, Raven."

With my head tilted back, he rests his forehead against the wall overhead, eyes locked on mine.

“This is my job, Ty. I’m not leaving. Besides I needed to speak to you.” I respond quietly.

His eyes search mine as I reach up, my fingers latching around the strings of his hoodie, “Firstly…” I whisper before pulling on them and he dips his face down close to mine until his lips hover just above mine.

I swallow hard from the close proximity, the smokiness of his breath and take a quick glance at his soft lips. I find myself stupidly wanting to kiss them, to feel them on mine, but I don’t, I tilt my head and softly press a lingering kiss to the corner of his mouth. His body stiffens from the connection, just enough for me to notice, and I release, my lips peeling away from his skin.

“Thank you,” I murmur before drawing back slowly. His dark eyes catch mine and I can see the intensity in them, the way he’s holding onto everything he has not to pounce and take advantage right here.

“I’m sorry…” I say, panic rising inside me and I try to slip past him, but his other arm rises quickly, resting against the wall, caging me in.

“If I wasn’t in here, I would have shoved my cock so far inside your ass by now, the only way you would have left this damn room is by walking like Bambi or worse, in a fucking body bag,” he growls against my lips and my eyes broaden.

“I’m clinging to every last shred of control I have, Kitten, but the thread is fucking fraying—bit by fucking bit, unravelling every time I see you, every time I catch even a trace of your scent, I can feel it slipping, that final hold on my sanity wearing thinner and thinner. I’m always mentally… fucking you. *Violently.* And I can’t get the images out of my head, especially with my hand wrapped around my dick.”

I take a deep gulp, a sickening thrill almost trembling down to my core as he continues, “Any cure for that before I leave, Ms Tate?”

I feel stuck, his cold eyes scanning mine, wanting me to play his game, but I stay professional and raise my chin in response.

“Go live your life, Ty. Meet a nice girl and have some fun. But not *violently.* Forget me and forget this place. You’re about to see how beautiful life can really be.”

Ty’s lips twitch ever so slightly, his brown eyes flashing with something that sets my nerves on edge. Without a word, he pushes himself off the wall before he turns away and walks toward his bag. The room feels tiny somehow, the tension coiling like a snake ready to strike. I exhale shakily, forcing a composed posture, even as my heart thuds against my ribcage.

“Ty, this thing…” I begin, my voice soft but firm and it makes him pause, his hand hovering over his bag, then he turns his head slightly to look straight at me. I gesture between us, trying to find the right words. “It’s not going to happen. I appreciate what you did—helping me with Billy—but…” I shake my head. “I’m sorry, this could never be a thing.”

For a moment, his jaw flexes, the muscles in his cheek moving with displeasure as he stares down at his bag. Then he straightens, letting out a small, humourless chuckle.

“Of course, Raven. I get it,” he says, and a small wave of relief washes over me.

But then he turns fully, his gaze sweeping over me, his lips curling into a smirk. “I mean, what pretty little perfect therapist ends up with their psychotic patient, right? That would be so…” his head swings from side to side as he studies me, “unprofessional.”

I don’t respond, the hairs on the back of my neck standing on end as he takes one slow step closer.

“Maybe you’re right, beautiful girl,” he continues, his voice dropping lower, more sinister. “Maybe this is just some sick little fantasy. I just need to fuck, that’s all,” he takes a brief pause his gaze darkening, “*Violently.*” He grits out, his teeth clenched.

My stomach churns, and I fight to keep my expression neutral. I stare at him, trying to decipher whether he’s teasing me, testing me, or just trying to rattle me. Whatever this is, it needs to end now.

I square my shoulders, my chin raising in defiance. “Is there anything else I can help you with before I go?” My tone is steady, but my fingers twitch at my sides, ready to move if he does.

He looks away, moving back towards his bag, and after he’s zipped his bag, he lifts it, slinging it over shoulder.

“No,” he says, almost bluntly. “You’ve done enough.”

I feel my shoulders relax, then give a small nod. “Well, goodbye, Ty.”

He just stares at me with his chin lifted, not saying any else, so I turn around, leaving his room with a strange sense of sorrow and confusion settling inside me.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Raven

It’s early evening, and I’m almost ready to go out with that couple—strangers. My introverted ass is kicking up a storm, making my palms sweat as I carefully apply my makeup, sitting at the vintage vanity in my bedroom. I hum absently to a melody that’s been stuck in my head, anything to distract from the anxious churn of going out. The rain pounds heavily against the window, a reminder to take an umbrella with me.

When I’m finished, I pause to take in my reflection: my red is hair styled in loose curls, framing my face in a way that softens my features. The subtle makeup highlights my cheekbones and jaw, but it’s the dark eyeliner and mascara that make my blue irises stand out. My dress is fitted, sitting off my shoulders and hugging my curves, its deep neckline emphasizing my collarbones and the mounds of my breasts.

My gaze drifts to the necklace lying on the vanity in front of me, a thin silver chain with a black diamond pendant, the only piece I have from my mom. I lift it, letting it dangle and catch the dim light before clasping it around my neck. My fingers graze over the cold gemstone as I look in the mirror, watching as it catches tiny sparks of light.

A gentle brush against my bare legs pulls me from my thoughts, and I glance down, smiling as I see Midnight winding around my ankles. Reaching down, I stroke her soft fur.

“I won’t be long, Middy,” I murmur. “Just a couple of drinks. I don’t plan to stay.”

It’s the weekend, and while there’s no work tomorrow, the idea of staying out, partying the night away, has never been my style, but maybe a quick night out won’t be so bad. It might what I need.

I lean down, lifting Midnight and cradling her against my chest. Her soft purrs vibrate warmly against me as I grab my small bag, slip into a pair of

tall black heels, and make my way downstairs.

Gently setting her down on the couch, I throw on my long coat, tying it snugly around my waist, and watch as she curls into a cozy ball, eyes drooping as if ready for a sleep. Just then, a knock at the door startles both of us. I take a steadying inhale, slide the bag strap over my shoulder, and pick up my umbrella.

With one last glance at Midnight, I head for the door. The cold evening breeze hits as I pull it open, sending my hair sweeping behind me, and I'm met with both their eyes on me, dressed up with broad, welcoming smiles.

"You look great!" The woman exclaims, her energy contagious, and I manage a warm smile back.

"Oh, and we forgot to introduce ourselves this morning! I'm Jess, and this is my fiancé, Mike."

I nod, looking between the two of them. "Nice to meet you both officially. I'm Raven."

With a slight shuffle, they step aside, and I glance one more time toward Midnight before locking the door. We all head up the street, umbrellas up against the heavy rain, and chat easily as we walk. They're friendly, and despite my nerves, I find myself relaxing a little more.

Eventually, we arrive at a small bar isolated in the middle of nowhere but alive with the warm glow of lights and soft laughter from inside. Mike holds the door open for us, and Jess and I slip inside, closing our umbrellas. The place isn't overly packed yet, and I'm thankful for it. As we head to the bar and order our drinks, I feel myself easing into the unfamiliar but strangely comforting atmosphere.

When I notice Jess is drinking something flat with no alcohol, I turn to face her.

"You're not drinking?" I ask just as the glass touches her lips.

"No, unfortunately I'm on call tonight. They told me last minute. I'm a community nurse, but hopefully nothing arises, and I can stay."

I give a small nod as I lift my own drink, taking a long sip of the fruity liquid.

“So, do you have a boyfriend back home?” she continues, her green eyes warm and curious.

I shake my head, offering a small smile. “Nope, no boyfriend.”

“Oh, that’s a shame,” she says.

Is it? I silently think to myself, swirling my drink. I’ve never been the type to go searching for my Prince Charming; knowing my luck, I’d probably fall for the villain anyway. I’ve dated a bit, mostly back in college, bad guys typically, yet none really scratched that itch. The problem with men is they can talk the talk easily, but when it comes to walking the walk? Pretty useless. Also between juggling work and losing my dad so suddenly, relationships have been the last thing on my mind.

Do I crave intimacy? Sex? Of course. Someone to be there for me no matter what and rely on sounds nice, but I’m not about to go out chasing it.

Jess’s attention lingers on me for a second longer, and I can tell she’s intrigued, maybe even concerned. I don’t blame her—it’s just that real life has a funny way of overshadowing fairy tales.

“So, when’s the big day?” I probe, aiming to steer the conversation away from my not-so-sunny dating life.

“Oh, we’ve only just got engaged!” she says, beaming, and flashes her hand to show off the diamond on her finger. “No date yet, but Mike here doesn’t want to wait.” She giggles, leaning into him, and he wraps an arm around her shoulders with a proud grin.

I feel the urge to roll my eyes but catch myself. Why am I out here with an adoring couple anyway? Watching them, so giddy and in love, is starting to make my skin itch, but maybe it’s the fact that I’m alone and somewhere, deep down, maybe I somewhat envy them. I only have Midnight waiting for me back home. I toss back my drink, hoping the alcohol will dull the edge of it all and maybe loosen me up enough to enjoy tonight, even if it’s just for a while.

After a few more rounds, the alcohol has laced a soft warmth through my body, making everything blur into the background. When someone turns on the jukebox and a lively beat spills out, Jess grabs my arm and pulls me off my bar stool.

“Come on, let’s dance!” she giggles, barely giving me a chance to steady myself as I stumble after her, heels clicking on the floor and a drunken laugh spills from my lips.

We sway and move to the music on the small dance floor, and then, out of nowhere, Jess presses in close, her body brushing against mine in a playful, seductive rhythm. I roll with it, feeling a familiar thrill. I’ve danced with girls before, hell, I’ve even drunkenly made out with them.

But this time, I can feel eyes on us, especially Mike’s greedy gaze from across the room. His stare burns, intense and unblinking, and it prickles my senses. I’m suddenly aware of other eyes, too—curious, watching from the shadows around the bar. I let the alcohol drown the discomfort and dance with Jess under the lights, feeling the hum of the night pulse around us.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Ty

“What can I get for you, handsome?” The barmaid asks as I slide onto a stool opposite her.

My eyes drag away from Raven, from the hypnotic way her body moves to the music, and they settle briefly on the bartender. She thinks I’m interested, leaning over the bar, her big tits perched on it, practically inviting me to ruin her by the end of the night, but all she’s getting is a flicker of my attention—a look that’s more like a warning than anything close to attention.

“Whiskey,” I say, my voice low, laced with a sharpness that probably cuts her a little deeper than she expected.

I’m not fucking here for her. This shithole, this drink, the people—they’re all just distractions. My real focus is my Kitten, caught in the haze of music and dim light, completely unaware of the hungry storm brewing just a few feet away.

The bartender places the drink down in front of me, but I barely glance at it. I let my gaze find Raven again, narrowing in on the way she laughs, so easy, so unaware. It’s an intoxicating pull. She’s out there with strangers who have no idea that she belongs to something darker.

Me.

Lifting the glass, I feel the weight of it, the way it fits in my hand. The burn of the whiskey against my lips is new, something I haven’t tasted before, a bite I don’t need, but tonight it feels wanted.

I’ve never seen her like this—so carefree, every guarded look and careful distance she usually keeps is stripped the fuck away. It’s powerful, yet somehow terrifying…for her, at least, but she doesn’t know that, yet. I can see that she thinks she’s safe, believing those walls she’s built up are

still protecting her. But they're not. Not from me anymore. I'm fucking here, hiding in the shadows, stalking her like a bloodhungry animal craving to tear my prey to shreds.

I hyper fixate on her, gradually losing the grasp on my restraint, on what little sanity I actually have, and I realize—there's nothing fucking stopping me now. Nothing holding me back from taking what I want, no matter what anyone says. This new freedom, to be able to claim her as mine is fucking dangerous, yet it's a danger I'm willing to drown us both in.

I'll destroy her, just to keep her.

Suddenly her and the blonde girl stop dancing and head in this direction. I drop my head, concealing myself with my hood, slowly sliding my black ski mask over my nose and mouth, shadowing myself. They settle at the end of the bar, laughing away and I peek around my hood, the smell of her evading my senses already even beyond the overpowering stench of alcohol and my mask.

So sweet and pretty.

"Damn it!" The woman she's with mutters, clutching her phone in one hand, already gathering her coat and bag in the other. "I've got to go," she says, leaning in to give her boyfriend a quick kiss on the cheek. "I'll be back in about an hour."

She hurries out, leaving my kitten alone with this weird dude, whose gaze has been all over her the entire night. The two of them watch her leave, and then Raven turns, slipping into easy conversation with him. It's light-hearted, friendly enough on her behalf—but the fury inside me starts to burn the more I watch. How he's looking at her, his hungry eyes dropping down to her tits every time she looks away.

When he presses her little nose with the tip of his finger, my blood runs cold. I'll murder the cunt. I'll chop him into tiny fucking pieces and send him home to his little girlfriend in pretty packaged boxes.

My fingers squeeze around the glass, every ounce of control barely holding me back from shattering it right here in my hand. She gets up again, sensing something, maybe feeling his sleazy fucking stare creeping up her spine as she heads to the jukebox, away from him. I track her with a side-eye as she passes, then lock my hooded gaze on him, watching through narrowed eyes as he makes his move. The cunt waits, scanning the room

like he’s being discreet, before pulling a small packet from his pocket and tipping it into her drink.

Anger coils inside me, winding tighter until I’m on the verge of snapping. The thought of that glass touching her lips forces every nerve in my body to the edge. I pull my mask down, and drag out a long sip of my drink, setting it down with a controlled calm that’s purely for show. My gaze barely leaves him as he taps his foot, his face smug with anticipation until he finally stands, heading toward the restroom, like he thinks he has it all planned out.

I look back at her glass, then at Raven by the jukebox, completely unaware. Sliding off my stool, I pass by her drink and with a sharp flick of my finger, I send it crashing to the floor, the shattering glass echoing through the bar.

“Hey!” the barmaid barks, but I don’t even glance at her. My eyes are fixed on that restroom door as I push it open, stepping into the dim, stale-smelling room.

He’s at the urinal with his back to me, whistling like he’s already fucking won. I walk forward slowly, lifting my mask over my nose and stopping just a few steps behind him, my gaze darkening as I picture all the ways this is about to end for him.

I observe him with a strange happiness as he finishes zipping up and finally turns, his eyes barely registering my presence before he tries to brush past me.

But he doesn’t get far.

My hand shoots out, clamping around his throat in a hold so tight his windpipe closes, his oxygen instantly choked off. His face turns a sickly purple as he claws at my arm, eyes widening in pure terror as he realizes he can’t break free. I lean in close, the grinding of my teeth almost audible, my murderous gaze boring into him, letting him feel every ounce of the temper boiling beneath the surface.

Just as he starts to put up a fight, I twist my hand tighter, then pull back and drive my other fist into his face with a sickening crunch. His head snaps back, but I keep him locked in place, tightening my hold, and then land another punch. And another. Each blow lands with brutal force, blood splattering my knuckles and his skin splitting under the relentless pounding.

His skull gives way under my power, and when I finally release him, he slumps to the floor, groaning in a half-conscious, bloody heap.

But I'm nowhere near fucking done.

Grabbing him by the collar, I drag his heavy body to a nearby stall, tossing him into the filthy cubicle. He lands against the toilet, but I don't waste a second. I grab a fistful of his blood-soaked hair and slam his face down into the shitty toilet bowl. He thrashes, spluttering as the rancid water fills his nose and mouth, but I'm beyond caring. I press my boot against the back of his neck, pinning him down with all my weight. His body convulses under me, desperate for air, but I hold him firmly, enjoying the way he struggles.

Reaching into my pocket, I slide out my knife, letting the blade gleam under the dim restroom light. I catch his waving hand, holding it in an iron grip, then raise the knife as he gurgles below me, the monster inside me fully unleashed.

I press the edge of the blade to the base of the finger that dared touch her little nose and with a swift flick, it's severed, hitting the filthy floor with a wet smack. He screams into the toilet water, his voice muffled and helpless. As I position the blade under the next finger, the door creaks open before closing again. My hand freezes mid-slice, and I turn my head slightly to see who it is.

It's her.

Raven stands there, clearly entered the wrong restroom, wide-eyed and rooted to the spot, her gaze flitting from the blood pooling on the floor to my hidden side profile.

Perfect timing.

I wait, expecting her to back away, to bolt from the room. But she doesn't. Instead, she stupidly steps forward, those soft therapist eyes fixed on me, trying to mask her panic with calm.

"Hey…" she says, like she's coaxing a patient out of a fucking nightmare. "You don't have to do this."

My teeth grind noticeably, annoyance sweeping through me as the guy's movements starting to slow. Any normal person would have run out that

fucking door, but not Raven, she's trying to act hero against a fucking serial killer. The stupidity of her innocence is shocking.

"Do you want to talk about it?" she murmurs, her voice annoyingly warm, her hand landing softly on my shoulder.

The moment her fingers make contact, I twist, reaching up and wrapping my bloodied gloved hand around her delicate throat before she could even see it coming. Her eyes go wide, a mix of terror and confusion flashing across her pretty face as I pull her close, lifting her just enough to force her up on her tiptoes.

"Well, well, well. Look who it is. My little kitten," I taunt, letting the words roll off my tongue, my head cocked to the side in an unsettling tilt.

She stares back at me, those expanded blue eyes searching my own, the only part of me visible through the dark mask.

"Ty?" she chokes out.

My hand strengthens around her throat as I walk her back, her fingers curling around my wrist, trying to pry me off. When I've got her trapped against the grimy tiles, I release her, and she gasps for air, her hand instinctively clutching her neck. Her eyes flick to the bloody mess behind me, but I shift, blocking her view.

"What have you done?" she asks, her scared gaze darting to mine.

"He drugged your drink," I reply, each word exact and cold. Her face shifts, suspicion turning to horror.

"What?"

"You left your drink alone, and he took his shot," I snarl, the anger fizzing under my hot flesh as I glance back at the unconscious scum on the floor, itching to finish the job.

"What are you doing here, Ty?" she asks softly. "Are you… following me?"

Her question pulls at something sinister inside me. I turn my head and take a step closer, eyes boring into hers as the truth—sick, hungry, and relentless—presses in, closer than she realizes.

"Yes," I respond quietly and honestly.

Her brows shoot up, panic flashing across her face, then without a second's hesitation, she tries to rush past me, but I reach out, grabbing her upper arm and dragging her back. She twists her arm sharply, wrenching free of my grasp, and glares at me with a fire I haven't seen before.

"I know you think I'm weak, Ty, but outside of those asylum's walls, I'm anything but." She hisses and presses a finger hard against my chest. I glance down at it, smirking slightly as she jabs harder.

"This ends now," she spits, defiance glistening in her icy eyes. "I'm done. Whatever you think this is, I'm not entertaining it. I'll turn you in… I'll…"

My jaw locks. "Oh yeah?" I cut her off, pushing her buttons.

"Yeah," her gaze narrows. "You need to leave me the fuck alone."

"But I did it for you, kitten," I growl, barely containing my frustration. "If I hadn't been here, he would've hurt you."

She shakes her head, her expression strained. "Thank you, but this—this isn't how to handle it. You could've just told me, warned me. Why… why cut his fucking fingers off?" Her tone drops, the confusion heavy, as if she's still processing the nightmare unfolding around her.

"Because he touched your little freckled nose," I reply, every word laced with raw, delirious truthfulness. Her eyes widen, her body betraying a slight shiver as she instinctively glances away, trying not to look into my intense gaze.

"Fuck," she whispers, but then, like a rabbit breaking for freedom, she bolts toward the door, but again, I'm faster. My hand catches her fiery red hair, yanking her back. She gasps, a small wince escaping as her back collides with my chest, and in one smooth motion, I slap a bloodied gloved hand over her mouth.

"Shh…" I murmur darkly, gazing down at her panicked side-profile, tracing the edge of my knife gently across her cheek, enjoying the way her body shakes in terror. She's facing the scene now, the guy's unconscious form slumped over the toilet, his face pressed into the bowl. Her breath traps, her watery eyes locked onto the deadly mess I've made, and I don't let her look away.

“I think he deserves to lose his eyes too, Raven.” I say quietly, my lips close to her ear. “After all… he dared to look at what’s fucking mine. That’s a death penalty in my book, but I’ll go easy just this once. If he loses his fucking eyes and fingers, it’ll be very hard for him to ever drug an innocent woman again, don’t you think?”

“Ty,” she pleads against my hand in response, a tear slipping down her flushed cheek. “Please don’t do this.”

“Oh, freckles, I’d do anything for you. But one thing I won’t do is have you stop me from doing what the fuck is right. You’ll learn the hard way, my beautiful girl.”

I slip my knife into my pocket and push her forward, guiding her to where he lies—his body limp. I pull him aggressively from the toilet, dragging him by his scruff, the sickening sound of his body scraping against the floor echoing in the cold, sterile silence of the bathroom. He lands with a soft thud, his face a grotesque mask of blue.

I lean down, forcing her to do the same, making her witness what I’m about to do. Her chest heaves with each breath until my fingers dive into his eye socket with a brutality that makes her stop inhaling all together. Instead, she screams into my palm, struggling against me, but I hold onto her tight, blood squirting from his eye as I try to dig further inside, attempting to get a good grasp to wrench it out.

Just as I yank it free, she strikes, her fist plunging toward me with cruel accuracy and smashing into my balls. A sickening groan escapes my throat as the pain sears through me. My hold loosens, just enough for her to wriggle free. I collapse to my knees, clutching my nuts, my vision blurring at the edges. From the corner of my eye, I watch her flee, her footsteps heavy with desperation as she bolts out the door, the faint scent of her fear still lingering in the air.

I wait for the pain to ebb away and when it finally starts to dull, a twisted smile pulls at the corners of my mouth. I rise slowly, eyes shifting to the gruesome sight before me. The eyeball, still fresh and glistening in the blood-soaked ground. I scoop it up, holding it in my hand like a fucking trophy before shoving it into my pocket.

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CHAPTER SIX

Raven

I burst through the side door, the relentless downpour soaking me in seconds. I dash across the desolate, rocky parking lot, hyperventilating, my hair and long, open jacket blowing in all directions. The alcohol begins to cloud my senses, my vision spinning as I try to keep my balance, every step growing heavier. I struggle to walk in a straight line, my speed increasing despite my wobbling. As I tug the middle of my coat around myself, I glance over my shoulder—and that's when I see him exiting the side door.

“Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.” The words escape in a panicked rush, but they do nothing to steady my heart. I push myself harder, my strides lengthening, but the damn heels slow me down.

I stop dead in my tracks, kicking them off and grabbing them in one hand with my bag in the other, my bare feet sinking into the wet, jagged stones beneath me. The pain is sharp, but it’s nothing compared to the terror gnawing at my insides. I keep glancing back, each time seeing him closer. His hands are casually tucked in his pockets, his hood shadowing his face, but I know those eyes are fixed on me. His long legs eat up the distance between us, and with every step, I feel smaller, weaker.

The moment my bare feet hit the cold, flat pavement, I pick up speed, sprinting down my street toward my house. All I can think about is locking myself away from him. I fumble with the zipper on my bag, fingers shaking as I dig for my keys and phone. I glance back, heart pounding, and there he is—still following, still relaxed, his unhurried steps in chilling opposite to my panicked scramble. It’s as if he’s relishing every frantic move I make, and that only deepens the anxiety I feel.

I can’t believe he did it—no, I can. I knew Ty wasn’t afraid of death or violence. I just didn’t realize he was still willing to kill so easily, so brutally. It’s terrifying proof that Ty hasn’t moved on from his violent past at all.

He’s still the same, maybe worse. The life I thought he’d left behind. It’s clinging to him, darker than ever. *What have I done?*

I need to call the police. I can’t let him stalk me like this. I can’t ignore that he’s hurting people again, that he’s taking justice into his own twisted hands. Sure, maybe he thought he was acting for the right reasons, but you can’t just fucking drown people in a shitty toilet, cut their fingers off and then rip their eyes out. My stomach churns as the memory flashes again—blood, the raw horror of it.

I steal a quick glance over my shoulder just as I reach my house, relief flooding me as I see he’s far enough behind for me to make a run for it. I bolt up the steps, heart hammering, and my hands shake uncontrollably as I jam the key into the lock, rotating it as fast as I can. The door creaks open just as he reaches the foot of the steps, his pace quickening, his shadow looming larger. I lunge inside, dropping my heels and bag before pushing the door shut with a panicked scream, but his gloved hand snakes around the edge, halting it.

He pushes back against my desperate hold before I stumble backward, spinning toward the kitchen. My mind races as I tear through the dim light, my hand finding the cold handle of a knife in the block. I turn, clutching it in front of me, the blade trembling in my grasp as I face the darkened doorway.

My ears strain to hear the front door close and track his slow, heavy footsteps as they cross the creaking wood floor, each step drawing him closer. I can barely control myself, my chest rising and falling in shallow, erratic wheezes. Then, he crosses the threshold, his shadow stretching across the floor. His figure looms impossibly large, like a phantom set on destruction.

“Get the fuck out,” I warn, my voice quivering with fear despite the blade I hold out between us.

My fingers tighten on the handle and my, forcing my grip to steady, but he doesn’t shy away. He doesn’t even pause. His dark gaze is locked on mine, his steps closing the space inch by inch. I back away, the edge of the counter pressing into me as I try to keep distance, feeling the walls closing in, knowing he’s not stopping until he’s got me cornered.

The tip of the blade brushes against his abs, and I have no choice but to ease it back, my hold faltering slightly. My chest restricts as I feel his heat against my cold skin.

“I will… I will kill you,” I whisper, the words trembling on my lips as tears begin to spill over. The knife shakes in my hand, the threat sounding weak, even to me.

He smirks, his eyes narrowing with a wicked gleam as his hands slide to either side of the counter behind me, caging me in. I’m forced to tilt my head back, his face so close I can see every drop of water glistening on his skin, feel the heat of his breath mingling with mine. Dark strands of his wet hair drip onto my face, cold against my flushed cheeks.

“So do it,” he murmurs, rough and deep, taunting me. “Pierce my fucking heart, kitten. Stab it. Cut me open. I’ll only ever happily bleed for you.”

He dips closer, his lips grazing mine, a shock of electricity shooting through me, coiling something deep inside. “Do it!” he barks, his teeth clenched, his voice loud enough to make my body jolt.

I stay silent, and he sees it—he sees every crack of my hesitation, my helplessness. His dark eyes flicker, drinking in my trembling gasps, tracing the curve of my throat as I swallow, the rise and fall of my breasts. His hand moves, rising slowly before his gloved palm presses against my chest, cold over my frantic heart. I flinch, but he doesn’t stop; his hand glides up, claiming each inch until his fingers are cradling my jaw.

With one rough push, he snaps my head back, exposing my throat to him, forcing my gaze up to the ceiling. My eyes squeeze shut as my body trembles, caught in the tension that winds tighter and tighter, my clutch strengthening around the blade I don’t have the strength to drive into him.

His hand slips around to the back of my neck, and his mouth hovers over my throat, sending a shiver that’s both electric and chilling down my spine. I feel his fingers weave into my hair, grabbing tightly, holding me in place with an almost cruel gentleness. His other hand, now gloveless, slides along the inside of my thigh, inching upward, his touch both searing and soft.

Instinctively, I force my legs together, trying to resist, but he doesn’t falter. His hand presses further until it’s just grazing the edge of my lace panties, and my limbs almost buck under his touch.

I want to say something, to snap out of this, but my voice is lodged in my throat, suffocating under the load of his closeness, his scent, the brush of his nose along my jawline as he teases me.

“This is what you want, isn’t it, therapist? It’s why you keep covering for a fucking murderer? But not just any murderer. *Me*.” he murmurs, his words menacing, yet full of desire. “You want your psychopathic patient to shamefully ruin this little pussy. To show you what it feels like to be fucked senseless by a maniac.”

His fingers move over the curve of my pussy possessively, rubbing and needing to feel every inch of me. I can’t help but gasp in response, my body betraying me. His tongue flattens against my throat, and he trails it upward until his lips are above mine.

I search his dark eyes as sneaks his fingers beneath the trim of the delicate lace, the back of them running over my bare lips and just as I part my legs, desiring to feel more, he grabs my hand that’s holding the knife and snatches it from my grasp with a speed that makes my breath catch, his hand tangling in my hair brutally.

Before I can react, he spins me roughly, forcing me to face the counter and my hands shoot out instinctively, my phone flying across the counter as I brace myself against the cold surface. He shoves me forward, bending me over, then his hold on my hair loosens, but there’s no pause.

His hand clamps down over my mouth, muffling the scream that almost tears from my throat, the sound dying against his palm, leaving only the frantic pounding of my heart and the cold, metallic thud as he slams the knife onto the counter beside me. Testing me to see if I’ll use it.

“Don’t worry, my little kitten. I’m not going to hurt you. It’s the fucking opposite actually. I just want to make my girl feel good. For now.” He whispers against my ear.

The air between us hums with tension, charged with the thought of what he’ll do next. His hand slowly trails over the curve of my ass, before curling around the hem of my dress and he yanks it upward, the fabric ripping over my skin, exposing me to him. I tense instinctively, my hands clenching as his fingers hook beneath the thin string of my panties, dragging it down my crack before he tugs sharply enough to make the fabric snap.

My eyes squeeze shut as he yanks me upward toward him, my back hitting his front, then pushes my feet further apart with his boots. He gazes down at my side profile as he lifts the knife again before he slips it down between my thighs and the dangerous sensation making me weak.

“Has a psychopath ever fucked your hungry cunt with a knife before, Ms Tate?”

The cold handle glides through my lips, its odd surface alien and invasive, making my legs quiver uncontrollably. He teases my clit with its edge before dragging it downward until he suddenly drives it deep inside me with a single, brutal shove. The scream that rips from my throat is muffled against his hand, the sharp stretch in my pussy burning through me like a mark.

He doesn’t wait, doesn’t let me adjust. He thrusts the handle in and out of my pussy violently, his movements relentless, feeding off every muted cry that escapes me. His breathing is harsh, uneven, almost guttural, as if my discomfort fuels him, pushing him further to whatever darkness that controls him.

My cries turn into unhinged, shameless moans, my eyes rolling to the back of my head. Come seeps from my pussy—unrestrained—dripping in a slow, rhythmic pulse that taps against the tiled floor between my legs. My knees threaten to give way, but he holds me, keeping me upright as he repeatedly plunges it deeper and harder, almost striking my cervix. I push my ass back like a slut, letting him ram it into me, chasing my orgasm, which is already quickly building.

The world around me becomes a blur of forbidden pleasure and pain, and I lose myself in the madness of it. I can’t escape. I’m fucking shattering. With one last, brutal thrust, my body convulses violently, every nerve on fire as a mind-ripping climax crashes over me, tearing through the very core of my being.

“You break so beautifully for me, Raven,” he growls against my ear breathlessly. “Like I’m the one who built you just to fucking destroy you.”

His thrusts gradually lose their frantic pace, the force fading until he rips the handle out of my soaked pussy, leaving me hollow and trembling. The cold steel of the knife clinks sharply against the counter as he tosses it aside

carelessly, his movements shifting from raw hunger to something colder as if his job here is done.

Without warning, he spins me by the hips and before I can even pull myself together, his hands are on me again—lifting me, effortlessly, and dropping my ass onto the counter. I hang my head, my wet red hair cascading over my face like a veil, hiding the chaos swirling in my eyes.

My body is strangely satisfied, my pussy screaming that it's what it desperately needed after almost five years of deprivation, but it's my mind that fractures the most. Guilt and shame coils deep in my gut, mingling with the undeniable ache of desire for him, the raw need to give in—and yet, I can't.

Not him.

His hand grips my jaw, forcing my face upwards, then he leans in to kiss me, but I flinch pull back, yanking myself from his hold and look away.

"I can't," I whisper, my eyes glazed over with unshed tears. A helpless shake of my head follows the words before my gaze drags back to his. "I don't know what you want from me, but I can't give it to you, Ty. I can't fix you. Not like this. Maybe in another life… but…"

His jaw clenches, his gaze darkening with a burning intensity. "You think I want you to fix me?" he bites out, his head tilting to the side, hardly holding onto his anger. "I don't need you to fucking fix me, kitten," he spits. "I want you because I want to fix you."

Confusion clouds my mind, but I can't waste any more time caught in these twisted mind games. This isn't some game. Not here. Not now. Not after everything that's happened between us.

"This is my life, Ty," I say, my voice shaking with every word. "Don't make a game out of it. I don't want you. I don't want your bloodshed. I don't want the guilt. Please, just leave me alone."

His eyes flash with something colder, and in an instant, his face is dangerously close to mine until our lips brush and I try not to flinch back.

"Bullshit," he snarls with frustration. "There's no getting rid of me, Raven. You're seared into my insane fucking mind—etched into my demented soul. You're mine. All. Fucking. Mine." His words are a bitter growl, each one wrapping around me like chains. "And the more you reject

me? The more I fucking want you. You think you can push me away, but your little no's mean fuck all to a psycho like me."

He steps back unexpectedly, and I slump forward, my body heavy with defeat. Through blurred vision, I watch as he calmly crouches and Midnight pads toward him, her small body pressing against his leg. Her trust is almost too painful to witness as his gloved fingers scratch behind her ears while she purrs, melting into his touch, her surrender as stupid as mine.

When he's done, he stands, his gaze flicking over to the knife on the counter that he just fucked me with, but his face shows nothing—completely unreadable, a mask of perfect composure before his eyes snap back to mine.

"I'll see you soon, my beautiful girl."

His words land like a death sentence but they, as always, stir something else inside me. Something unwanted. Something shameful. I can only blink, numb to the ache in my chest as a single tear slips down my cheek.

Without another word, he turns, his boots heavy against the floor as he disappears into the suffocating darkness beyond the door like a ghostly entity. The moment the front door clicks shut, a sob tears its way from my throat, breaking the silence he left in his wake.

I sag against the counter, my shoulders weighed down. I close my eyes, feeling the phantom cold of his touch still pressed against my skin and the sharp sting of his last words cutting through me.

After a while of gathering myself, I sluggishly slide off the counter, turning around to find my phone. My blurred eyes sweep across the counter, but it quickly becomes clear, he's fucking taken it.

I growl, swiping the tears off my face with my palms before leaning down and scooping Midnight into my arms. As I lock the front door and climb the creaking stairs, my limbs feel like lead, my mind clouded, and by the time I reach the bedroom, exhaustion clings to me.

I flick on the light and place Midnight onto the blankets on the bed before moving toward the window to close the curtains. As my fingers wrap around the heavy, floral fabric, something pulls me to look down outside.

And there he is.

Ty stands at the entrance to the cemetery across the street, lit up by the faint halo of a streetlight. Rain pours down in relentless torrents, soaking his black hair until it clings to his handsome face. Water drips from the sharp lines of his jaw but he doesn’t seem to be bothered by it, he seems to relish it.

In one hand, he holds a cigarette, the ember glowing faintly against the downpour. His other hand hangs loosely at his side, but everything about him is taut, coiled, like he’s waiting for the perfect moment to strike. His brown eyes bore into mine through the rain, and it feels as if the distance between us doesn’t exist.

My mind churns with the havoc of what just happened between us downstairs, the way he made me feel. Rough. Violent. Wrong. And yet, somehow, it felt stupidly right. He felt right.

I ask myself why? Over and over, the question loops in my mind like a broken record. Is it because I’ve lacked intimacy for so long, craving the touch, the connection I’ve been deprived of? Is it because he’s undeniably beautiful, with a face that could disarm any woman? Or is it something darker—because he’s like the forbidden fruit, tempting and dangerous, offering a thrill I’ve never allowed myself to chase before?

Or maybe, somewhere deep down, I see beyond the façade. Beyond the degrading words and the haunting smirks. Beyond the killer's confidence and the chaos he wields like a weapon. I see the lonely man he’s become. Broken. Lonely. Just like me.

But the thought sickens me even as it sinks its claws deeper into my chest. How the fuck can I feel like this about him? I don’t know him—not really—and what I do know is drenched in constant blood and horror. He’s done terrifying things. Horrific things. Fuck. He’s getting into my mind isn’t he? Or am I the problem?

In another crazy life, maybe I wouldn’t have fought it. Maybe I’d already be on my knees for him, surrendering to his obsession because at least it’s real. That dedicated, deranged keenness he shows—it’s frightening but strangely intoxicating. Yet it’s not simple. Nothing about this is simple.

I’m a therapist, and he’s a psychopath. We’re two forces that shouldn’t collide. That shouldn’t want to collide. Therapists don’t do this. They don’t

lose themselves to the patient. They don’t erase guilt with violent fucks or entertain the idea of covering for someone capable of countless murders.

I shouldn’t even be thinking about him.

And yet, here I am, drawn to him still. He’s dangerous. So fucking dangerous. And no matter how I twist it into my mind, I can’t shake the feeling that maybe that’s exactly why I didn’t say no. Why my knees go weak in his warped presence. Why I blush when he calls me kitten or beautiful girl. Why I keep covering for him, shielding him from his own violence.

Every single time I done that, I’ve only fed his obsession, let it grow—let him get deeper under my skin. But not anymore. Tomorrow, this ends. This dark pull he has on me? It stops now. I’ll break this mentality before it breaks me.

My heart slams in my chest while we stay locked in an unbearable stare. When I can’t take it anymore, I yank the curtains closed with trembling hands, shutting out the sight of him and the storm. I draw in deep gasps of breath before turning around and climbing into bed, hoping tomorrow I’ll have a clearer mind and plan to deal with this.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Ty

Standing outside the small, isolated church, I feel the rain soaking through my clothes, the coldness biting at my skin. The rush of tonight is still pulsing in my veins, the adrenaline driving me into madness. The wound in my abs throbs with the reminder of her, the knife she pressed into me until I pressed it into pussy.

I fucking snapped, lost my sense of control, but it was worth seeing and hearing her come apart. It's just a fucking shame it wasn't on my dick.

I wasn't the only one who lost my mind in that moment. The way she pushed back to take more of that handle. The way her come dripped down my glove. Kitten loved having that knife deep inside her tight cunt.

As I always thought, she digs the fucking danger that lurks around me. Her fear, her small, shaking body. It makes my insides churn, the mix of irritation and... something else. Maybe some fucked up deprivation. She shook from the terror and the pleasure, and a part of me—so much of me—wanted to take it further, to break her completely and force her to feel what I feel. But instead, I left her to think about how I violated her, and how she loved every fucking second of it. I'm sure her mind is as messed up as mine is right now.

I lift the glove to my face, pressing it against my nose, and inhale deeply, my eyes sliding shut. The scent of her sweet pussy is still there—clinging to me like it's branded into my very fucking existence, a part of me now. I can't think. I can't fucking breathe. The smell of her, the feel of her, it's burned into my brain, pumping through my veins like a drug I never wanted but can't live without.

How the fuck am I supposed to function when she's not beside me? When she's not fucking mine? Every second away from her feels like

sandpaper against my nerves, grating to the bone. I don’t want air if it’s not fucking laced with her. I don’t want life if it’s not created around her.

The freedom of my release—it’s doing things to me, ripping at parts of me I didn’t know was there. I’m so full of pent-up weird emotions I feel like I might explode, my wrath taking every fucking thing out with me.

I tilt my head back, letting the rain wash over me, the cold droplets mingling with the heat pulsing through my veins. The storm inside me mirrors the storm outside, and for a moment, I just take it all in, trying to find a way to calm the savage animal tearing inside me.

I need her. It’s suffocating. It’s like a beast desperate to be freed. I have to take her. She’s mine. She’s not taking it seriously yet, but she will. She’ll understand when I’m done with her, when she’s where she’s meant to be—beside me.

She doesn’t belong to anyone else. No one will have her. No one will ever fucking touch her like I do. No one will ever be obsessed with her like I am. I’ll carve my mark into her until she’s nothing but a willing, trembling little thing, begging for my hands to be on her. She doesn’t know how much she craves it—how much she needs it. But she will.

I chuckle softly to myself, the sound almost lost in the howling wind and pouring rain. *I’m fucking insane*. My grasp on reality sinks more each day. I know it. I can fucking feel it. But it’s the only thing that makes sense. It's the only truth left in my fucked-up life.

Me and her together.

I lift my head, refocusing on the small church I know all too well. The candles flicker inside, creating distorted shadows against the stained-glass windows. I tilt my head to the side, eyes narrowing, before throwing my heavy backpack over my shoulder and tugging my ski mask over my nose. My fists clench, irritation wrapping itself tightly around me as I move toward the heavy oak doors, boots splashing in the flooded water beneath me.

When I reach the entrance, I lower my head and press the handle down. The door opens slowly, the rusty hinges creaking softly, and with it, the memories flood back—one by one, repulsive, and continuous. My jaw clenches as I close the door behind me. I glance around the dimly space briefly, slowly stepping forward, my soaked clothes leaving a wet trail

behind me. The pews line the aisles, but my eyes lock on the large, wooden crucifix pinned high on the wall.

I reach the end of the church, my gaze fixed on Christ, and for a moment, everything goes quiet—too quiet. My palms begin to sweat in my leather gloves as I stand there, staring up at the figurine, knowing exactly why I'm here.

He knows why I’m here.

As soon as the priest walks in on my right, I don’t even spare him a glance. I keep my eyes locked on Jesus, his symbol fixed, taunting, and testing me.

“I’m sorry, child, we’re closed for the night,” the priest calls from a distance, his voice bouncing off the cold, empty walls.

I finally drag my eyes away from the cross, my dark gaze settling on him. I stare at him with dead eyes, devoid of anything that might make him suspect who I am. He’s aged obviously and he doesn’t recognize me, but it’s been over twenty years. And I’m masked now—there’s no reason he would. I’m not sure if that’s better or fucking worse. He should remember me.

He moves toward me, each step reverberating in the quietness, and I feel my body freeze instinctively, muscles knotting, tension rising like a slow burn.

“I need a confessional, Father,” I murmur, my words low—too low—but he hears. He stops in front of me, his gaze flicking over me, searching, calculating.

“Come back tomorrow, son,” he says. “It’s late.”

I shake my head, my gaze dropping to the floor for a moment, the stress of my past pressing down on me. “I need to confess my sins. It’s killing me.”

I can feel him eyeing me, yet I can’t bring myself to meet his stare, but I know what I need to do. I need him to hear me.

After a long pause, he exhales a sigh of surrender, and finally he walks toward the confessional, giving in far quicker than I expected. I lift my head, scanning him as he slips into one of the booths. I stride toward them, feeling the walls closing in on me as I get closer.

I get inside, close the door behind me, and settle onto the small wooden bench, dropping my bag between my legs. I can see his side profile through the small, grated window of the confessional, calm but with a touch of uncertainty as if he's not really sure what to expect from his late-night visitor.

"Bless me, father, for I have sinned. It's been sixteen years since my last confession."

"Go ahead, my child. What brings you here tonight? What weighs on your soul?"

I lower my gaze to my gloved palms, watching the tremor that shakes through my fingers. It's nothing compared to the hurricane inside me. I see nothing but blood—splattered crimson staining my skin beyond the fabric, seeping into my rotting heart. It never leaves. It never fucking fades, no matter how much I clean them. I can still hear the sound of the axe slashing through their flesh, bones splitting.

"I killed my parents when I was thirteen, Father." The words feel alien, cold on my tongue like they shouldn't be there, but they're the truth. "I axed them to death."

I take a deep inhale before continuing, "I was locked away, locked up like some animal... to become a better person, to regret what I had done. They thought they could fix me." I chuckle quietly, but there's no humour in it—just bitterness. "But it only made me worse. I don't feel remorse. I never have. I don't regret it. They deserved it."

I don't expect him to understand. How could he? The reality of what I did, the joy of it, never truly left me. It's not something I can easily take back or apologize for. And the truth is, I never wanted to.

"I understand your pain, my child," he finally responds, but there's no empathy, just a strange serenity, like he's heard this all before. "But you must understand that this confession, this burden you carry, is not something you should bear alone."

I can feel his gaze sharp behind the grill. I can almost hear him mentally cataloguing my sins, trying to understand the depths of my crazy mind, trying to piece together who I am.

“You’ve taken a life,” he continues, his tone steady now. “But the Lord forgives those who seek redemption. Why do you seek confession, child? What do you wish for here, now, after all these years?”

I let the question roll around in my head, considering the truth. What the fuck am I looking for? The answer isn’t simple, nor does it matter. I’m here for my own reasons. To finish where it started. I open my mouth, but the words get stuck. Instead, I let the silence fill the distance between us again, just for a second longer.

“It all started when I was six years old. I was molested in a church.”

His body tautens visibly beside me, suddenly on the edge and I continue. “The day that priest took me in the back room during Sunday service and forced his fucking dick in my mouth was the day something broke inside me. Yet in time, it only warped into something much worse. Something I am today.”

He won’t engage anymore, and his silence screams louder than any words. I fix my gaze ahead, but the memory swirls in my mind—fuzzy, fractured—but it’s always there. Always.

“Do you know who let it happen?” I ask, but he says nothing, so I twist my neck, dark eyes cutting into him through the gaps between the shadows.

“The two people who should have saved me,” I growl with resentment, but he doesn’t flinch, he just stares straight ahead like I don’t exist. Like I’m not sitting here, bleeding words into the air. “And now—now—I’m the fucking insane one? The demon? The monster? The one who’s going to burn in hell for all of eternity? How the fuck does that work? What about those who hide behind Christ when they’re really the devil?”

“I’m sorry, son.” He says weakly—empty. He doesn't know what to say, doesn’t know how to fix this. My eyelids fall shut, my head resting back, but his apology is nothing more than noise—nothing can fill the black hole gaping inside me.

“Of course you are, Father.” The words slip from my lips like venom.

I stand, my body stiff as I grab my bag, then shove my way through the confessional door. I can’t fucking breathe in here. He’s too close. I head straight for the exit, his presence trailing after me, his footsteps desperate, too fucking desperate.

“We’re not done. I haven’t said a prayer. I haven’t…” he insists, and my jaw clenches, a wave of heat rising in my chest, my ideation flashing with hostility.

“Let’s be real, father,” I sneer, my words slashing through the air. “There’s no exorcising the demon that festers inside me. I was molded into the monster I am by other monsters. It’s in my blood, rushing through my veins. Nothing Christ can do will cure this. *Nothing.* Not you. Not him. Not fucking anyone.”

I freeze in the middle of the aisle, every nerve screaming and I feel him stop too, right behind me. My hand shakes violently as I grab the cold, hard handle in my bag before, slowly, I turn my head, eyes carving through him over my shoulder.

“Tell me, father,” I whisper, my eyes stinging with unshed tears, “have you ever sinned?”

His words stutter, like the importance of my question finally cracks through the armor of his denial. For a second, reality pours into his eyes, but then he shakes his head—once.

Lying motherfuck.

The look I give him is pure, unfiltered disgust. I can’t fucking hide it.

“Are you sure?” I ask, staring at him with a coldness that could freeze blood, a tear now dropping from the corner of my eye.

He hesitates, but the refusal is still there, thick, and stubborn, as if he can convince himself he’s earned his place in the Lord’s house. I raise a brow, daring him to keep up the charade. Slowly, I turn my face toward the door again, every muscle in me tense, ready to snap.

“I can feel your lies, Priest,” I say, my voice turning lethal, like I’m enjoying the taste of them. “And like me, you’re already damned. You’re going to fucking hell, just like the rest of us. No amount of holy water, no endless prayers, no saviour is going to wash away the dirt of what you did to me.”

Just as his lips part, as if to speak the words that might save him, I fucking crack. My fingers wrap tight around my axe handle as my heartbeat hammers in my chest.

I spin, the blade slicing through the air with a disturbing quickness. It sinks through his neck—like fucking butter. His flesh splits with a sickening, wet sound, and before he can even react, his head is falling from his shoulders. His eyes are still wide with shock as blood squirts from his open neck in hot, crimson waves, spraying and coating my clothes.

His head hits the floor with a dull thud first, rolling away, followed by the collapse of his body, heavy and lifeless. I can feel the rage surge like fire through my veins, burning hotter with every second. Pent up after years of horrifying memories and without a thought, I raise my axe again, my hold tightening, my vision clouding.

The first smash echoes like thunder through the silent church, the blade sinking deep into his body with a nauseating crunch. I don't stop. I fucking can't. I bring the axe down again, and again, harder each time, the weight of my wrath slashing through his flesh until it's a heap of bloody tissue. The sounds of bones shattering, of blood pouring, of my own breath raggedy are wild—it's all a symphony of my murderous rampage.

"FUCK!" The harsh, pained roar rips through me, echoing off the church walls as I raise the axe one final time.

With every last ounce of my strength, I hurl it across the room and the blade spins through the air before it finally crashes into the crucifix, splintering wood and sending fragments flying.

I collapse to my knees, the force of my defeat crashing down on me. He sticks to my body, to my clothes, a constant reminder of what I've done, what I've become. My soul, what little is left of it, throbs with an ache so deep it feels like it's scorching from the inside. My head hangs low, and I can't seem to stop the uneven weeps that wrack my body. Tears blur my vision—tears I didn't think I had left.

I thought this—this first step—would give me some relief, some closure. But it's only made it worse. The emptiness, the hurt, it's deeper now, a wound that's been torn wide open.

This isn't over. No, it's only the fucking beginning.

I wipe my running nose with the back of my gloved hand, my eyes finding the shattered crucifix, and I tilt up my head, trying to steady myself, trying to get air back into my lungs. Then my bloodied finger rises, trembling, and pointing accusingly.

“Don’t fucking look at me like that,” I growl, every word like it’s being ripped from the depths of my chest. “This is your fault. You let him in your house. You allowed this.”

I shake my head, sobs trying to scratch at my throat, desperate to break free. More tears flood down my cheeks, mingling with the blood, each drop a sharp reminder of how fucking broken I am.

“You continued to allow this…” I choke out, a rasping whisper of agony.

My eyes squeeze shut, trying to block out the truth—the agonizing truth. I’m nothing but a fucking victim drenched in blood. I lower my head again, every part of me rattling, damaged. I don’t know if it’s the tears, the blood, or just the burden of everything that’s destroyed me, but I can’t breathe.

I’m fucking drowning in the pain.

After some time of letting it all out, a chuckle suddenly bubbles up from my chest, low at first, before it grows, twisting into something loud and unhinged. The kind of laugh that belongs to someone who’s already too far gone.

I throw my head back as the last remnants of it leave my throat and I steady myself, still grinning. I look down at the mess in front of me. His body lies in pieces, hacked apart like a fucking puzzle waiting to be solved. The sight should be horrifying, but instead, it’s almost...artful, to a deranged fuck like me.

After reaching into my bag not too far away, my hand closes around a bottle liquor, and I yank it free, twisting off the cap with a sharp crack. Without hesitation, I throw my head back and take a long, burning chug.

When I’m done, I turn back to the carnage and carefully begin to piece him back together, moving each severed part with a strange devotion. His arms, his legs, his torso—they slot into place, creating the outline of a cross. The irony isn’t lost on me, and a dark smile tugs at the corners of my mouth.

Finally, I grab his dismembered head, his wide, lifeless eyes staring into nothing. I lift it by the gray hair, painted with red and drop it at the top. For a moment, I just stand there, admiring my work.

As soon as I’m ready to leave, I rise, slinging my bag over my shoulder and glance at the dismembered body one last time. I tip the bottle, letting

the liquor spill freely. It pools across the floor, soaking into the wood, glistening as it seeps into the crevices. A dark trail snakes over his remains, clinging to the blood that's already congealing around him.

The bottle slips from my hand, shattering against the ground, the sound sharp and final. My bloodied axe catches my eye, and I lean down to grab it while pulling out a gas lighter before flicking it open with a metallic snap. The tiny flame dances in the dark, fragile yet destructive. With one last look at the man and the church that helped shaped the demon I've become, I toss the lighter onto his remains.

The fire catches instantly, spreading like greedy tongues of flames that lick at his broken body, consuming it piece by piece. The stench of burning flesh fills the air as I back away slowly, my gaze fixed on the inferno as it devours everything—his body, the pews, the altar. The church that birthed me as much as it damned me.

…

Outside, the drizzling rain falls in light, misty sheets, but it's no match for the fury of the fire. Flames roar, bursting through stained-glass windows, turning holy images into a picture of pure hell.

I stare expressionlessly before taking a long drag of my cigarette, watching the church collapse into itself, then I turn, entering deep into the dark woods. My boots crunch against the wet leaves as I disappear into the shadows, leaving behind the ruin I created, the embers of my vengeance still glowing in the night.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

Raven

I wake with a groan, my skull throbbing, and rub my sore eyes. When I finally manage to open them, a burning ache spreads, the harsh morning light searing through the thin crack in the curtains, a blinding beam that feels like it's slicing right through me. I roll onto my side, groggy, reaching out instinctively as Midnight brushes up against my arm. But as my gaze falls on the pillow beside me, my blood runs cold.

There, lying on the silk—like some twisted fucking macabre prize—is Mike's eyeball. Staring right at me.

A scream rips from my throat, raw and panicked, as I fling myself out of bed, stumbling backward until I hit the wall. My eyes stay glued to the grotesque thing on my pillow, frozen in horror. My entire body trembles, the edges of my vision blurring as flashes of last night's nightmare creep back—Ty, his hands dripping with Mike's blood, the sickening sound of when he shoved his fingers into his socket.

For. Looking. At. Me.

I can almost feel his presence in the room, and I sense the smell of him. A wave of nausea rolls over me, but I force myself to move, yanking a tissue from the box on my bedside table. With a shaking hand, I reach forward and cover the eyeball, then recoil as I cringe.

Asshole.

If I wasn't so terrified I might have laughed at the insanity of it. But this is no joke. He left the fucking eyeball there to taunt me. To show he isn't going to leave me alone. To make me realize he has been in here, watching me while I sleep like a creep.

Straightening up, I spin around, my heart racing as my gaze darts across the room. That's when I see it—the bedroom door, wide open. I spot

something on the floor, and I slowly creep toward it, my eyes narrowing. When I'm close enough, I lean down, noticing tiny dots of red scattering on the wood.

I mutter to myself in disbelief, "Is that fucking blood? He was in here… and I didn't even hear him?"

Last night I was exhausted—dead to the world, a heavy sleeper, but still, how didn't I hear him? This house creaks and groans every time you move. I cover my mouth with my hand, the realization that I'm not safe, not here, settling in like a stone in my stomach.

A sudden, loud knock rattles the door downstairs, and I jump, snapping upright. Quickly, I tie my robe around my waist and lift Midnight onto my chest, cradling her tightly as I make my way downstairs, each step slow and cautious. As I reach the living room, the knock comes again—firmer this time.

"Who is it?" I call out, trying to keep my tone steady, but the thought gnaws at me: What if it's Ty? But then again, I'm starting to realize he isn't the type of guy to knock.

I wait, breath held, holding Midnight a little tighter as the silence stretches out longer than it should.

"It's the cops, ma'am." A male voice calls out, unfamiliar and stern.

"Fuck," I mutter, pulse spiking. There's a goddamn eyeball and blood upstairs. I quickly smooth down my hair, creeping toward the door. When I crack it open and peer around the edge, two older cops stand there, observing me.

"Good morning, ma'am. We'd like to ask you a few questions about an incident at the bar you were at last night."

My brows knit instinctively, realizing that I'm probably an accomplice at this point since I didn't call them last night like I'd planned to before Ty took my phone.

"Incident?" I echo, playing innocent.

One of them nods while the other just studies me, his gaze piercing, like he already knows I'm hiding something. My throat narrows, but I step back and let them in, watching as they scan the shabby room. I set Midnight down, and she tiptoes away as they continue to assess their surroundings.

“You own this property, Miss?” one asks, and I shake my head, crossing my arms.

“Ms Tate and no, I’m renting it for the month while I work at Sacred Heights.”

They exchange a glance before one pulls out a notepad. “You were at Little Bottles Bar last night, right?”

My stomach knots, but I keep my face neutral. “What’s this about?” I ask, though I already know exactly why they’re here.

“There was an extremely violent crime last night,” one officer says, his tone even but probing. “After speaking to a witness, we were led here. You were with Mike Wright and Jessica Lanyard, correct?”

I nod slowly, feeling the heaviness of their stares as he presses on. “Can you tell us what happened?”

I take a slow, steadying exhale, shifting on my feet. “We had a drink,” I start, “and then Jess had to leave for work for about an hour. I stayed with Mike, but…” I pause, glancing between them, hoping my face doesn’t betray me. “He disappeared, so I just… went home.”

“Disappeared?” One asks, taking notes.

“That’s right,” I say, lifting my chin a little. “I went to the jukebox to choose a song and when I returned to the bar, he was gone. I’m not familiar with the area, I’d only just met them and once I was left there alone, I just… decided to leave.”

The officer nods, his eyes dropping back to his notepad. “Did you see anything or anyone suspicious? Anyone who looked… off?”

I shake my head. “No, I just kept to myself, listened to the music and had a few drinks. I wasn’t there very long. Maybe an hour max.”

My mouth feels dry as sand, and I shift slightly, then look up at them, widening my eyes just enough. “Wait… is everyone okay? Was anyone hurt?” I ask, letting a hint of worry soften my voice.

The officer’s expression darkens slightly. “Mike is in very serious condition at the hospital. I can’t share more at this time, but we may need to come back for further questions. We’re looking at all witnesses very closely.”

His words make me panic. Could I get into serious trouble for all this, for all of Ty's bizarre ways. What if they think I was involved? What if it's all twisted around on me? What if SHA gets wind of this?

The thought makes my head spin, so I keep up the innocence, and my hand moves to my chest, letting out a soft gasp in surprise. "What? But what happened? Will he be okay? And Jess… is she okay?"

The officer gives a small nod, but his face is unreadable as they both head toward the door. "We hope so," he says over his shoulder.

As they open the door and start to leave, I call out after them. "If there's anything I can do, please don't hesitate to contact me!"

Once they're gone, I shut the door and lean back against it, breathing hard through my mouth, trying to slow my racing heart. My hands are shaking, and I stare down at them, gripping the door for stability. That was… strange. Their questions were so short, almost careless. But one thing is clear: I need to get out of here. Today.

Screw this job. This small town. This madness. Ty. I'm done with it all. With him lurking around every corner, there's no settling here. I can't be involved in all this.

…

After scrubbing this house clean with bleach and discarding Mike's eyeball down the toilet, ironically, the day has turned into early evening. I have my suitcase packed, bumping it down the stairs. I thought it would probably be better if I left when it's dark, when neighbours can't see me make my escape. I drag my suitcase across the wood before placing Midnight's crate down. I crouch, opening the little door, ushering her in, but she just stares at me from a distance.

"Come on, Midnight, get inside. I'm going to take you somewhere safe baby." I say gently, but still, she refuses.

Suddenly there's a frantic knock at the door and I bolt upright.

"Raven? Raven? Are you in there?" Jess's voice comes through the wood and my eyes expand.

Shit.

“Just a second!” I call back as I smooth my black dress down with my trembling hands. I then stride toward the door.

I click the lock and slowly open it, peering around it. My eyes instantly meet Jess’s, red and wet. She moves forward, giving me no choice but to let her in and I step back. With the door still open, I turn to face her and before I know it, she’s throwing her arms around me. I tense up as she sobs into my shoulder hysterically.

“He’s dead!” She wails into my ear, her body shaking uncontrollably.

My eyes almost bulge out of my head, “What?” I gasp in actual shock, my hand finding her back.

“I just got the call...” she sobs, “He’s dead!”

Guilt twists inside me, sharper than anything I’ve ever felt. For the first time—even with all my experience as a therapist—I’m completely speechless, unable to find any words to comfort her. She pulls back, sniffling, rubbing at her swollen eyes.

“They said he had drugs on him… that he might have been involved in dealing.” She shakes her head, her gaze darting around the room, avoiding mine.

“But he wasn’t like that, Raven,” she says, finally meeting my eyes. “He was innocent. He never did anything wrong. He was a good man.”

I press down the cyclone of feelings rising inside me—the part of me that wants to ask why a “good man” would try to spike my drink. Was Ty right? Was Mike planning to do something to me? Or was that just another one of his games? A reason to kill an innocent man out of white-hot jealousy.

“I’m sorry,” I mutter, dropping my gaze to the floor. “The police came today, and I told them he just… disappeared when I went to the jukebox, and then I left.”

She gives a small nod, not pressing me any further, but her eyes drift around the room until they finally landing on my suitcase.

“Are you leaving?” she asks, her gaze snapping back to me and my stomach drops.

“Uh… yeah, I am,” I reply, scrambling for an excuse until one pops into my head. “It’s this house. The damp’s been getting to my lungs. I’m going to check into a local motel I think.”

A flicker of hope lights in her eyes, her face softening. “Why don’t you stay with me? Please, Raven... I could really use the company now. I’m not far from here.”

My mind races, trying to think of a way out, but then something catches my eye. Midnight, usually terrified of the outside, is slowly edging toward the open front door. My breath hitches. She’s never shown any interest in the outdoors before.

“Midnight?” I call softly, distracted, as she pauses at the threshold.

Without warning, she bolts, darting over the threshold and out into the fog-laden street. A gasp escapes me, my heart lurching as I race forward, watching her small shape slipping further into the shadows toward the pitch-black cemetery across the road.

“Midnight!” I call out, my voice shaky, but she just keeps going, the faint ringing of her collar bell fading into the dark.

“Shit!” I hiss, glancing back at Jess and without thinking, I grab her hand, pulling her out the door as I slam it shut behind us.

“I’ll be back!” I shout, already dashing forward in my bare feet, the cold pavement stinging as I head toward the graveyard. The fog thickens, swallowing up Midnight and leaving me chasing shadows as I plunge deeper into the dark.

Nothing matters except getting her back.

I sprint between the tombstones, eyes darting through the gloom.

“Midnight!” I call again, but she’s already too far gone.

I push harder, following the small jingle of her bell like a beacon. Soon she’s leading me into the dense woods beyond the cemetery, disappearing further into the darkness.

“Midnight!” I yell again, feeling desperate.

As I enter without hesitation, the forest feels strange, eerily quiet except for the pounding of my own pulse in my ears. The atmosphere is heavy here, the odour of damp earth and decay clinging to everything. I push

through the undergrowth and my doubts, my feet slipping on wet leaves and sodden mud, branches scratching at my bare arms and legs as I stumble forward.

Then, through the trees, I see it and stop dead in my tracks. A huge clearing and a silhouette of an abandoned, gothic-like mansion, rises out of the haze. Vines crawl up its stone walls, and the windows are dim, like empty eyes staring into nothingness, but Midnight's outline captures my attention, darting in front of the entrance, vanishing into the shadow of the door.

A tremor snakes up my spine. Something about this place doesn't feel right—like I'm about to walk into something that I might never come back from. But I have no choice. Midnight is my entire world. She's all I have. I can't leave without her.

The mist swirls around my feet, clinging to the ground like it doesn't want me to move forward, but I need to. As I reach the bottom of the stone steps, I tiptoe upward toward the huge door, glancing behind me, almost expecting someone to be there, but there isn't.

When I reach the top, I notice the front door is slightly ajar, its rusty hinges creaking in the wind. I freeze for a second, questioning my life choices. Then, I feel my feet shifting forward again until I'm pressing my trembling hand on the damp wood, pushing it open.

Inside, dust settles in thick layers on everything and in the back of my throat. The grand foyer is dim, the only light coming from the windows, casting everything in a pale, ghostly glow. I glance around; the space feels antique, as if it's been forgotten for decades. The staircase ahead is dark, the banister cracked and twisted, but I barely notice—my attention is on where Midnight might be.

"Midnight?" I whisper shout as the door softly closes behind me. Every part of me screams to get the fuck out of here, but my stubbornness stops me. I must find her.

Midnight's small, weak meow comes from somewhere above me, echoing down the hallway, and I follow the sound.

Each step on the staircase creaks, louder than it should, the old wood protesting under my weight. The walls are lined with faded wallpaper, peeling at the edges, revealing more of the dark wood beneath.

“Midnight?” I call again, my voice trembling. I hear another meow, closer this time, and the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. The top of the stairs is even darker as I reach the landing; there’s hardly any light.

I hear the soft jingle of her bell, distant at first, then unmistakable as it grows louder. I whip around, and there she is—Midnight—dashing down the corridor toward me. I feel my shoulders sag, by body relaxing, but it’s short-lived. I take a few frantic steps forward, desperate to grab her, to get the fuck out of here, but then I stop dead in my tracks.

She’s not moving toward me. She’s standing still, just a few feet away, staring intently at something in the wall—her body stiff, her tail twitching.

My brows furrow in confusion as I shift forward, my voice low, coaxing, “Midnight, come on, baby, let’s go.” But she doesn’t respond. She doesn’t even flinch.

I click my tongue, the sound familiar, the same way I do when I have treats. Still, she doesn’t budge. Her amber eyes remain fixed on the low, square opening in the wall, unblinking, almost hypnotized by whatever’s beyond it.

I move closer and just as I step within arm’s reach, Midnight does something I can’t understand. She walks forward, casual and unhurried, but as she does, she disappears. My heart stops as I freeze in place, my blood turning to ice. My eyes are wide, unblinking, unable to tear themselves away from the spot where she was just standing.

I shakily walk forward and soon the black square in the wall becomes clearer with each step. I stop just in front of it, my eyes glued to the jagged edges, the darkness summoning me like a void that has no end. Without thinking, my hand reaches out, trembling as I stretch it toward the opening. The moment my fingers make contact, a chill runs up my spine, and my hand disappears into the emptiness, swallowed as if the wall itself is devouring me.

Panic surges but I drop to my knees, the cold floor rough beneath me, and I peer into the crawl space—utter blackness stretching into infinity. I know it’s irrational, that every part of me is screaming to get away from this place, but... But Midnight’s down there.

When I hear her small meow again but from somewhere inside the damn hole, I quickly rub the tears off my cheeks, and I start to inch forward.

Fuck, I must be out of my damn mind.

As soon as one of my arms enters, something suddenly clamps around my wrist, yanking me forward with brutal force. A petrified scream tears from my throat, reverberating in the suffocating darkness. I'm dragged violently through the pitch-black, claustrophobic tunnel, my nails clawing desperately at the rough surface in a useless attempt to slow the relentless pull.

Then, just as quick as it began, I'm released and my body collapses as my heart pounds wildly, threatening to burst from my chest. I hesitate, dread coiling around my spine as I slowly lift my head, worried about what I am about to see next.

I immediately see a big room in front of me. A dimly lit space with low beams that crisscross above. The smell of old wood and dust fills the air. A wooden chair sits abandoned in the center of the room and a sagging couch lingers in the corner, the fabric worn thin. A couple of bookcases stand against the walls, their shelves overcrowded with faded books. But it's the window that grabs my attention.

A huge, floor-to-ceiling mosaic circle window dominates the far wall, its complex design hardly visible beneath layers of newspaper scraps, taped tightly over every inch, blocking out the light.

I push up on my shaky arms and drag the rest of my body out of the narrow space. When I'm standing upright, I brush the dust from my dress while taking it all in. This place feels forgotten, hidden away in the depths of the house.

Then, a soft sound—a close jingle of Midnight's collar.

I swiftly turn, my heart pounding in my chest staring blankly into the shadows, but just as I'm about to move forward, a large figure steps out. My breath gets stuck in my throat, and for a moment, everything goes still. His dark eyes lock onto mine, piercing and cold, his face half-covered by a hood and a ski mask.

In his arms: Midnight.

She's calm, purring softly as he mindlessly scratches beneath her chin, but his entire focus is now on me. My legs go weak, I want to move, but I

can’t. I just stand there, stiff, my watery eyes darting between Midnight and Ty, my body shouting at me to act, but my mind can’t catch up.

“Give her to me,” I demand quietly, but shakily as a tear escapes and trails down my cheek. I reach out, but he doesn’t do anything. He just continues to stare at me, as if he hadn’t heard a word I said.

“FUCKING GIVE HER TO ME!” I scream, my voice cracking with the rawness of it all, but again, he doesn’t flinch. There’s no emotion.

I glance to the black void in the wall, my only escape, but I know better. This fucker knows I won’t leave without my baby.

“What do you want?” I choke out, the realization hitting me hard—he lured me in here using her, my one weakness, the only thing that can hurt me.

I lower my head, and he takes slow steps forward, walking around me like I’m a caged animal. He stops behind me, dipping his head until his mouth is close to my ear.

“You,” he whispers, the single word hanging in the air like a dark promise and my eyes squeeze shut, dread coursing through me.

“I told you, you can’t have me.” I force the words out, lifting my chin to appear braver than I feel.

He chuckles softly, circling me like a predator sizing up his prey. “You talk as if you have a choice, Raven. But here with me? There are no fucking choices.”

I bite down on my teeth as he stops in front of me, his gaze piercing through mine. “You can’t just keep me here.”

“Oh, I can, beautiful girl,” his voice is calm, terrifyingly confident before he leans in, his face mere inches from mine, his eyes reflecting a possessive glint. “You were trying to escape me, and I can’t lose you.”

A flicker of confusion crosses my face. “Lose me? Escape you?” I whisper, searching his eyes.

He raises his hand, and I instinctively flinch, but his fingers tighten in the back of my neck, pulling me close, forcing my face dangerously near his.

“Don’t worry, Kitten. I’ll take care of you.”

“I won’t say anything. I won’t tell anyone about last night. Just let me go and I’ll…” I force the words out, desperation laced in each syllable.

He scoffs lightly, dark amusement flashing in his eyes. “Do you think I give a fuck about being caught, Raven?” I halt as he continues. “I’ve always had one plan, and now, you’re woven into it. Whatever comes after doesn’t matter, but right now? Right now, I’m going to relish every single second of my freedom... and my plans. *You.”*

“Why?” I murmur, feeling a deep chill as his eyes roam over my tear-streaked face, drinking in every ounce of my fear. “Why me?”

“Because I want to tear down every piece of you, break you until you’re mine only. I want you to see the world through the nightmare of my mind, to taste what stirs inside me.”

“But…”

“I’m going to pull you into my insanity, Kitten,” he growls, his fingers sliding around to rest against the base of my throat, squeezing just enough to send a thrill of panic through me. “You’ll feel the darkness seep into your skin, infect your every last innocent thought. It’ll suffocate your fucking senses, so deeply that soon you won’t know how to breathe without me.”

My lips part to speak, but he beats me to it, voice cold and unyielding. “You’re going to do as you’re told, or this will get a lot worse for you. It’ll be easier if you just surrender now, accept what’s coming.”

A sour laugh escapes before I can stop it. It’s the only coping mechanism I have left.

“Is that why I’m here? Why you’ve trapped me?” I bite out, forcing myself to look him in the eye, my voice dripping with bitterness. “Because you want to fuck me?” The words come out more eager than I intended, but the question is raw. If that’s all this is, I’ll grit my teeth, spread my legs and let him have his way with my pussy if it means he’ll let me go. He’s already fucked me with a damn knife.

His lips curl into a twisted smirk, his gaze traveling down to my heaving breasts, lingering with a cruel consideration.

“Or just stare at you,” he murmurs, taking a slow step back, analyzing me as if I’m some haunting sculpture he can’t look away from. “I’m not

fussy, freckles. But eating your pussy is definitely at the top of my list of things to do."

His stare feels like it could strip away my clothes, the tension wrapping around my lungs and core, stealing my breath. My pulse hammers, every instinct begging me to try to run, but his intense eyes have me trapped in place, as if he's consuming every single ounce of fear and probably a bit of arousal he just unleashed.

But there's something deeper behind his intentions. A cold dread sinks into my stomach as I realize: there's no reasoning with him. Not like this. I'm no longer in a safe environment. I'm standing in an abandoned fucking building with my obsessed, psychopathic patient who's very capable of switching and killing me.

Every part of me wants to disarm him with words, but my inner therapist is lost, buried under terror, the darkness I once felt few two years ago, slowly sweeping through my veins. I swallow hard, the reality crashing down—I'm not the observer in this moment, I'm his prey.

"Hold out your wrist," he orders, his voice a low threat.

As he leans down to set Midnight on the floor, I move without thinking —my knee driving up toward his face, but he's faster. His jerks back, his hand catching my throat, forcing me onto my tiptoes and his other hand lands on my asscheek with a bruising tightness, pulling me close before he lifts me.

I scream with everything I have, kicking out wildly, but he manoeuvres me like I'm nothing more than a damn doll, forcing me down to straddle his crotch on the unstable wooden chair.

"Get off me, prick!"

I thrash against him, desperate, but his hold is unbreakable. In one swift motion, he aggressively forces both of my wrists behind me, and cold metal snaps over them, biting into my skin as he locks handcuffs around the,.

"Fuck. Your screams are delicious, Kitten."

My pulse hammers as I struggle against the cuffs, but I feel stuck, my chest rising and falling as panic sets in.

"Look at you," he mutters, satisfaction in his eerily calm tone that annoys me to no end. "Fight all you want, but like I said, there's no

escaping us and what we have.”

I bring my face dangerously close to his, my teeth biting, “I fucking hate you!”

He doesn’t recoil, he just peers into my angry eyes and how relaxed he is annoys me further. I groan, lowering my head, my red hair falling forward to shield my face, but I barely have a second to think before his hand snaps up to my jaw, forcing me to look at him.

Our eyes lock, and a sinister smirk plays on his lips. Then, his fingers slide through my hair with a strange tenderness, brushing it back over my shoulders so that he can see me more clearly.

“You look so pretty when you’re scared of me, freckles,” he growls and my teeth grind down, trying to push back the array of emotions that overwhelm me.

His hand drops to my bare thigh, his touch slow, possessive and I jolt, trying to pull back, but he grips tighter, refusing to let me move. He keeps his dark gaze on mine, his hands gliding upward along my skin, under my short dress until it’s wrapped around my bare asscheek. He grabs it hard, pulling me up his thighs, positioning me exactly where he wants.

Suddenly he flicks a knife out with his free hand, pressing the sharp blade firmly on my throat and I instinctively raise my chin, holding my breath.

“You’re going to come like this, Kitten. By grinding your deprived little pussy against my dick,” he demands with no room for refusal.

A pulse of fear floods through me as I feel the very big outline of his hard cock against me, pressing through the thin barrier of my panties. My body betrays me as warmth coils in my pussy, tight and unsettling, and I clench my fists, fighting against the sensation building between us.

He wraps his fingers around the thin strap of my panties, and with a swift yank, it snaps, falling uselessly. His hand finds my bare hip, grabbing it with a greedy dominance as he grinds me down onto him, forcing me to move.

“Ty,” I gasp out, my eyes instinctively shutting. *“Shit.”*

The tension between my thighs intensifies as the length of his dick slides up and down the slit of my pussy, teasing and compelling me to feel every

inch. I desperately try to shut out the sensations that threaten to pull me under, but his hold on me keeps tightening, sinking me deeper into his control.

As the pressure builds, my hips start to buck involuntarily, pressing against him, the friction making me pulse with an urgent need. Before I can gather my senses, he seizes the moment, his hand slipping around the curve of my ass, fingers grabbing the delicate fabric of my panties and he rips them clean off my body with an aggressive force. A shiver runs through me, my mind momentarily blank as I'm too consumed by arousal and horror.

"Don't you fucking stop or I'll slice this pretty throat and fuck your dead, bloodied body anyway," he grits out with animalistic frustration.

He hikes my dress up, exposing my lower half, and my hips move frantically, stupidly desperate for more, as if I know no restraint on my own damn morals. The rough fabric of his jeans rubs against my exposed clit, dampening with a trail of my come and he growls in response, the sound deep and dark, His gaze locks with mine—fierce, as if he's claiming me, as if he might snap at any moment and pull his cock out so I can ride it.

"Such a needy, little kitten," he mutters, pressing the blade more firmly against my skin until I feel the sharp sting as it nicks me.

A trickle of blood slips down my chest as his big, warm hand slides up my body under my dress, holding the small of my waist harshly. He leads my movements, each stroke along his shaft igniting a spark of desire and my body betrays me—shaking, trembling, as if it has a mind of its own.

I mindlessly shift my pussy at just the right angle so I can chase my looming climax, moans spilling from my lips shamelessly. Then, with a sudden rush, a wave of pleasure explodes through me like nothing I've ever felt before. The orgasm slams into my entire body in blissful convulsions, and I'm left gasping, quaking in the wake of it.

I hear him groan, his forehead slamming against my chest, and that's when I feel it—his big cock pulsing beneath me, thrumming in sync with my throbbing pussy.

Fuck... he just came too? I've never made a guy cum like that before. Not just from grinding my pussy on his dick. I'm not sure if he planned to do that.

His knife slips from his hand, hitting the floor with a loud thud, and we both pause, caught in the aftermath of what just happened, both struggling to breathe. Then, without warning, he stands, keeping me locked around him.

My legs cling to him as he moves, taking us a few steps before, in one swift motion, he drops me onto the cold floor. I land hard on my ass with a groan. He leans over, unlocking one handcuff, but my momentary freedom is brief. Before I can react, he snaps it around an old radiator behind me.

“Ty…” I murmur, my voice soft, trying to reason with him, but he doesn’t even glance my way anymore.

Shame fills every part of me. FUCK. I can’t believe I just came on him like that. I was stupidly weak in that moment, like some desperate little slut and he relished every second of it. He knows what he’s doing.

I watch him intently through a blurred, teary stare as he strolls over to a small fireplace I didn’t even noticed in the shadows before and he flicks out a lighter, crouching down in front of it.

He lifts an old piece of newspaper, the fire engulfing it and lighting up the dark, large room before he tosses it inside. A shiver runs through me, his heat on my skin just a moment ago gradually slipping away. My breath is visible in the cold air, and I huddle against the radiator.

Soon the fireplace is fully ablaze, and slowly, the room is being filled with a warmth I desperately needed. I start thinking about how I’m going to get out of here. Maybe Jess will call for help. Maybe I’ll be saved. Then my mind returns to Ty as he walks around the room, gathering cushions and blankets, now not willing to talk with me.

I can’t help my mind turning to more sexual thoughts after that just happened. Is he a virgin? I mean, it would make sense right? Fifteen years in an asylum since he was only thirteen. How he just came from the friction between us so easily. But then again, so did I and I’m not a virgin. Maybe he was just turned on just as much as I was.

But it makes me realize, I don’t really know much about him at all. Yeah, I know what he’s done. The bad things about him, but who’s he beyond that? Who has he been for the past fifteen years? Why does he want me out of all the women he could have?

It’s no secret that psychopaths become obsessive with frightening speed. When the urge consumes them, they take what they want, regardless of the cost. They think of themselves as superior—untouchable—and they alone hold the truth, even if the path they take is nothing short of monstrous. Empathy is foreign to them, and they can’t grasp the same emotions as others can. Their world is one of control, where morality is twisted to fit their needs, and their ability for cruelty knows no limit.

But one thing Dr Moss said about Ty still lingers in my mind—he’s on the mid-scale of psychopathy. Does that mean there’s still something inside him I can reach? Some flicker of humanity, a shred of remorse, buried deep beneath the surface? Or is that just me being desperate?

Sometimes, to outsmart a psychopath, you have to step into his mind, even if you risk becoming a part of the darkness yourself. Maybe I can turn his obsession with me into my weapon, use it to my advantage. It’s a dangerous game, but what other choice do I have? Have I ever tried to manipulate a patient before? No. Could I fail, utterly and horribly? It’s possible. But I have little choice.

What if, once he’s finished with me, he decides I’m no longer useful? What if I’m just killed and discarded—buried somewhere, where no one will ever find me? Because let’s face it, who the fuck would even notice I’m gone anyway? Maybe he knows that. Maybe I’m his easy target.

I observe him from a distance as his fingers brush through Midnight’s fur. She purrs under his touch, content and trusting beside him, which is unsettling.

How the hell did she manage to bait me here? The thought nags at me. Midnight’s always been cautious of other people, but now she’s at his side like she’s known him forever. It doesn’t make sense. She’s who led me here. Pulled me right into his wicked embrace. She’s part of it. They worked together to bring me into his trap.

I lower my gaze, a sense of betrayal twisting in my chest—until he rises, standing tall and yanks his hoodie over his head in one quick movement.

I stare at him, unable to stop myself. His body is lean and ripped, I already knew it would be, but what shocks me are the scars—small and large slashes carved into almost every inch of his skin. Even from this distance, I can see them clearly, marks that his documents never mentioned.

My brows knit in confusion. None of his files ever suggested an accident or some form of self-harm, so how did he get so scarred?

As he turns his back to me, undoing his belt, he kicks off his boots, moving with confidence. My eyes drift over his physique, captivated, unable to peel my gaze away. He's not overly broad, although he's extremely tall, but each muscle is defined, flexing with every movement, and I can't even deny it—the sight of him, scarred and bare in front of me, is as frightening as it is alluring. He's fucking dangerously beautiful.

I force myself to look away, desperate to rein in any drop of attraction—or worse, attachment—to him. This ain't right. None of it is. He has me captive, for fuck's sake. He just pressed a knife to my throat and ordered me to hump his dick through his jeans. And I did. I foolishly humped until I came. Until he came. *Shit.*

But when he slips off his pants and boxers, my eyes deceive me, drawn back to him, catching his firm ass and legs which are also scarred. He's clearly not shy, maybe a little too brazen actually, despite the fact that he could be a virgin.

He pulls on clean gray sweatpants, leaving his torso bare before he moves to set up what looks like a makeshift bed on the floor. Once he's finished, he strides over to me, and I quickly drop my gaze, hoping he doesn't catch the mess of feelings he's building inside of me.

He crouches, his intense stare fixed on my pale face as he unlocks one of the handcuffs and before I can even register the relief, he snaps it around his own wrist, locking us together. My eyes fly to his, but his expression is blank. Without a word, he stands, pulling me up with a swift tug that leaves me stumbling behind him as he crosses the room.

He drops onto the blankets and pillows spread by the fire, yanking me down with him, and I awkwardly land on top of him. Quickly, I roll off in panic, settling beside him, keeping my head down. He stays on his back, but I can feel his eyes on me, studying me carefully, our arms bound together above us. He reaches down, tossing a blanket over my body, easing some of the cold that's seeped into my bones.

Midnight makes her way over with casual confidence, climbing across me to curl into a ball between us. I pull my arm from beneath the blanket to

stroke her, feeling her silky fur brush through my fingertips as she drifts into sleep.

She may have betrayed me tonight, but she's still *my* little traitor.

For some time, we just lie there, the fire crackling and filling the silence. Eventually, I glance up at Ty, watching him stare up into the darkness, his other arm resting behind his head, making his muscles appear even more sharp.

"What is this place, Ty?" I ask softly, breaking the quiet, hoping to slip past whatever walls he's built around himself.

He doesn't respond, doesn't even blink, just stares upward, his only reaction a subtle clench of his jaw. The slight agitation fuels my curiosity, and I find my eyes wandering over him now that he's so close. I trace the scars covering his skin, each one a secret that draws me in deeper.

Slowly, I lift my hand away from Midnight, feeling a slight tremor in my fingers as I reach over, wanting to touch one of those marks.

He suddenly looks down at me, a harsh warning flashing in his dark eyes. I recoil slightly, my heart stumbling, my hand frozen midair. But instead of backing down from him, I find myself pushing him further, testing his boundaries.

Warily, I reach out again, my fingers hovering just above his flesh, feeling the heat radiating from him. Until, finally, I lower it onto his abs. Instantly, they tighten beneath my touch, his teeth clenching before he pointedly shifts his gaze back to the ceiling, allowing me this small victory, even if he's clearly pissed off about it for some reason.

My fingers tremble as I trace one of the more deeper scars on his skin, the ridges hard, and my mind becomes tangled with questions about the history etched into him.

"Did this happen at SHA?" I murmur, barely clear, hoping he'll speak to me about it, but also needing to keep the question away from his childhood, just in case.

At first, he doesn't answer, as if deciding whether he'll let me in. His eyes flicker all over the shadowed ceiling until finally, he speaks, his tone flat and distant.

“I fell through a greenhouse roof when I was a kid after climbing it. It shredded me to pieces.”

That would explain why it was never in his notes. There wouldn’t have been a reason for it to be if it was an accident and it happened before he killed his parents. But I start wondering why not his face? It’s flawless, but I don’t press any further. For now.

My gaze trails slowly until it lands on a bloodied mark, hardly visible between the curves of his abs. I lift my head slightly, taking in the wound—the one I inflicted on him last night with that knife. A sigh escapes me, tired and heavy, as the reality of it all smashes down on me. So much has happened since I set foot in this small, creepy town. I can feel everything spiraling further out of my control, slipping through my grasp like sand.

“You left that eyeball on my pillow, Ty,” I say, pulling my hand away from his abs, feeling the weight of each word.

“I know,” he replies, not offering the slightest hint of explanation, so I press on.

“The police came to ask about Mike. He was in serious condition in the hospital…”

“And?” His tone is cold, indifferent, his eyes still fixed on the ceiling as if none of this concerns him.

I swallow, feeling a surge of frustration at his relaxed dismissal. “Then his girlfriend came by later that evening to tell me he’s dead.”

“Good,” he says flatly, as if it’s the most natural thing in the world. “That’s what happens to cunts who fuck around, Raven. They find out.”

I bite back a sassy comeback, rolling my eyes at his lack of regret. But before I can respond, he turns his body toward me, shifting until his head rests on my pillow, his face inches from mine. Our noses almost touch, and I feel my breath stop as his gaze drops from my eyes to my lips, his attention unwavering.

“Did you tell them it was me, Kitten?” he whispers, his smoky breath kissing my lips.

I hesitate, memories flashing through my mind of last night and his antics. I didn’t tell them of course. I’d lied, covering for him yet again. And he knows it.

“I plan to when I get the chance. You took my phone.” I reply, tilting my chin defiantly, challenging him.

His lips jerk, a spark of laughter dancing in his intense dark eyes, glinting in the firelight.

“Of course you do, beautiful girl. What is this? The third or fourth time?”

My jaw tenses as I glance down, breaking eye contact, hating the fact he’s right. I’d destroyed everything I believe in, for him. I should have turned him in as soon as he laid his hands on me in Sacred Heights, but facts are facts, if I did, I probably wouldn’t have survived Billy.

“I like to see the good in people, Ty,” I murmur, my gaze trailing slowly up the expanse of his body, lingering on every scar, until my eyes find his again. “I want to believe they can come out of the darkness. Everyone has a light somewhere. No one is completely… evil.”

He studies me for a long second, as if weighing my words against a truth he’s known far too well, and I continue.

“I gave you a few chances because you were so close to your release… I thought you deserved a chance at life.”

Slowly, he lifts his hand, the back of his fingers brushing my cheek, and I feel myself tense as his thumb traces over my bottom lip.

“And that’s where you were so fucking wrong, Kitten.” His voice drops to a low hum, as if he’s letting me in on a secret.

“You’re staring evil in the face right now—not just in me, but all around you. The sweet neighbour. The friendly teacher. The skilled doctor.” I search his gaze, feeling the sincerity, a sinister confidence in his words as he leans closer. “They just keep theirs buried, hidden behind smiles and power and that makes them far more dangerous than I could ever be, especially to people like you.”

My heart beats erratically as I absorb his words, the world I thought I knew shifting under me, but I don’t want to feel it and I try to push it at the back of my mind.

“Because someone like you… someone with light in them?” His voice softens, but a dark edge laces his words, cutting into me. “You’re the

perfect prey for those who know exactly how to wrap that light tightly around their little finger until it's squeezed the fuck out of you."

His eyes narrow slightly, roaming over mine. "And after that?" He lifts his hand and snaps his fingers causing me to flinch slightly. "*Darkness.*"

The word slips out like a warning, sending a shiver down my spine. "Darkness swallows everything in its path eventually, Kitten. And you're going to learn that."

"Ty…" I start, wanting to tell him I've been in the dark, that I can somewhat understand so I can help him if I can, but his finger lands on my lips. "Shhh," he hushes. "Therapy session over. Go to fucking sleep."

He shifts onto his back, turning away, as if he's closed a door between us, dismissing me entirely. A heavy sigh slips from my lips, filling the silence that suddenly stretches between us, until, finally, I feel sleep tugging at me, my body surrendering as exhaustion seeps in.

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CHAPTER NINE

Ty

The first light of dawn seeps through the mosaic window, casting a faint colourful glow across the room. I stand at the far side, watching her as she sleeps in the warm light, her face peaceful, her red hair glistening with every breath she takes. The morning softens her features in a way the firelight never did.

I tug a clean hoodie down my body and over my head, then shift slightly, bending into a crouch to tighten my laces. Midnight sneaks around my feet, her sleek black fur rubbing up against my legs, meowing softly.

“Yeah, yeah. I hear you. You’re hungry,” I mumble, reaching down to run a hand along her back, feeling the vibration of her purr against my palm.

As I rise, Kitten stirs, her hand slipping out from under the blanket as her lashes flutter. I pause, one boot still unlaced, and watch her, almost captivated, the way her brows pinch as she glances around in confusion. She’s handling all this better than I expected, almost too well. Even in sleep, I can tell she’s keeping herself shielded, playing some deeper fucking game.

But I see through it. Those pleading, sky-blue eyes are like bait. She’s trying to figure me out, see what’s locked beneath the surface, just like any therapist would. She doesn’t know that what she’s after is something I’ve buried too deep, even for her to touch.

She’s not here for that. She’s not here to fix me. Whether she realizes it or not. There’s no breaking free—not from me, not from this. She can tell me everything I want to hear. Hell, she could let me fuck her violently like I want to, but I’m never letting her go.

I finish with my laces and straighten, then head toward her, my heavy boots making her shoot up on her elbows, watching me carefully through

tired eyes. I stop by her feet and lift my fingers.

“Get up.” I say dryly.

She sighs, throwing the blanket off her and I can’t help but look at how her body moves. Memories of last night flood through my deranged mind. How I placed that knife on her neck and made her dry hump my hard cock through my jeans.

She fucking loved it.

Raven has a dark side to her that she likes to keep hidden, but I felt her hunger in that moment, even as she tries to cover it up with those careful eyes and that faultless composure. I saw it, the way she unraveled, to the point where I ended up busting in my fucking jeans just from the sight of her.

Fuck, it took everything inside me to walk away. She wants me. She just doesn’t want to admit it, but that’s where the fun lies. I don’t just want her to want me; I want her to fucking crave me. Then when she finally submits, if I make it that far, I’m going to screw that perfect cunt so savagely, she’ll be raw from the ferocity. She’ll never want to be without me.

My pulse thrums harder as I watch her adjust her dress, her tits jiggling beneath the thin silk, little nipples stiff from the cold. I have to look away, my jaw clenching as I start to feel the blood rushing into my cock, making it swell against the tight fabric.

I force myself to stay in control, but my thoughts drift to all the twisted fantasies I can’t shake—the thought of her riding me, breasts bouncing as she sinks onto every inch of my dick repeatedly. The way she looks coated in blood. How she would look naked and coated in my blood. I shake my head, fighting the images that push at the edge of my mind, threatening to tear through the last shred of restraint I’ve got left. She’s there, right in front of me, ready to take. To fucking destroy.

Once she’s finally got herself together, I catch her wrist, tugging her along behind me. I grab my backpack and toss it into the crawl space, lowering myself in backward, dragging her down with me. She resists for a moment, but eventually, she’s forced to follow me, her breaths quick and shallow in the tight passage.

When we reach the other side, I climb out first, extending a hand to pull her through. Her gaze darts around, taking in the empty corners of this house in the morning light. I know every creak of these old floors, every shadow, but I refuse to let myself take in the memories that lie within the walls. She trails behind me, Midnight padding in her quiet, unbothered way until I open a bathroom door and tug Raven inside.

I unzip my bag, pulling out one of my oversized hoodies, and hand it to her. She takes it, brows knitting in confusion as I study her. She hesitates, but finally slips it on, the fabric swallowing her frame until it drowns out her perfect curves.

“Sit down there,” I order, pointing to the radiator bolted to the wall and her wide eyes snap up to mine, flashing with something between defiance and fear.

“Now, Raven.” My tone hardens and she swallows, glancing down, then slowly moves toward the radiator and sits, pressing herself back until the cold iron is against her spine. I crouch and reach into my bag again, pulling out the cuffs and her eyes expand as she realizes what’s happening, shaking her head frantically.

“No, Ty!” she pleads, panic rising in her voice, but I ignore her, clamping the cuff onto her wrist with a determined click, locking her to the radiator.

“I’ll be back. I’ve got some things to do.”

“You can’t just leave me here!” she snaps, her scowl deepening.

“Yes, I fucking can—and I will.” I lean in close, my face inches from hers. “And you can scream all you want, beautiful girl, but no one will hear you. Not here.”

I place a bottle of water down, keeping my gaze locked on her. “Toilet’s right there. Water. What more do you fucking need?”

She glares at me, her voice slipping from desperate to something more angry. “For you to let me go, maybe? You can’t keep this up!”

“Can’t I?” I reply coolly, raising an eyebrow. “You’re already with me, Raven.”

“I need to go to work in two days.. I need to…”

“I told you, you’re not going back to that fucking asylum, Kitten.” I growl. “You will NEVER be reaching that top floor. It’s fucking dangerous!”

Her bottom lip quivers, “You keep treating me like some fucking fragile little thing! You don’t know me at all!” She screams in my face.

I lean in close to her face, my teeth biting, “You’re my fragile little thing. You want insanity? To be surrounded by the darkness? You’ve got it. Right here, with me. Get the fuck used to it!”

Tears well up in her pretty blue eyes, and for a second, she looks so small after everything I’ve put her through. I reach out to her face almost instinctively, but she flinches back, pressing into the cold radiator as if it could protect her from me.

“Just go,” she whispers, her voice cracking.

I watch her, studying the fear, the resentment, and the realization setting into her face. There’s no remorse in me, no moment of second thoughts. Her feelings are fucking irrelevant, just collateral damage in a game I’ve always played for my own twisted satisfaction. She’s exactly where I want her—at my mercy, with nothing but me and the walls that hold her.

I slowly stand upright, turn and walk toward the door, closing it behind me.

…

After striding through the woods that surround the mansion, smoking a cigarette, I find myself in the graveyard. I trail over the overgrowth, weaving between tombstones, my eyes set on one in the distance. As I draw nearer, my palms begin to sweat inside my gloves, my heart beating a faster.

When I’m close enough, I step in front of it, my eyes glued to the grave. I crouch, my hand reaching out, swiping the moss that’s covered both of their names, the stone old and neglected.

Here lies Finn and Olivia Easton.. Loving Father and Mo…

I growl and shift my eyes before I lose my shit.

“Loving.” I scoff, then lift my cigarette, stubbing it out over the “loving” part, the embers blowing in the mild breeze.

This is the first time I've come to their grave. I always knew it was here, tucked away in this shithole, forgotten. They apparently wanted to be buried in the small town they grew up in—the town that shaped them, twisted them into what they were.

I lift my head, taking in the gloomy surroundings. Thick trees loom over the graveyard, their bare branches clawing at the gray sky. The air is damp, the kind that clings to your skin and seeps into your bones. It's a fitting place for them—silent, bleak, lifeless.

"You're all cozy where you wanted to be put, but what about her? Where was she put?" I murmur the question like I might get an answer, my eyes slowly returning to their head stone. "All you had to do was tell me… Tell me the fucking truth for once in you goddamn lives. Now look. You can't even fucking speak. Feel. You were killed by your own kid."

A dark chuckle escapes, hollow, humorless while I shake my head. "You both ended up right where you belong. In hell. And I'll meet you there soon enough, I'm sure."

Memories from that morning flicker through my head, vivid and haunting. The last time I saw them. I've never spoken a word about it—not to anyone. Yet it's the clearest thing lodged in the shadows of my mind, a scar I've buried but never let heal. The truth of what happened. Why I did what I did, why I was pushed to the point of no return. No one would ever understand. They'd look at me with blank eyes, dismissing it, branding me a fucking liar. Even if they did believe me, they'd turn away, shielding themselves from the truth that's too dark for confront.

Power—it rules this fucking world, quietly wrapping itself around everything. The root of all evil, twisting and bending people to its will. It doesn't just command. It fucking consumes. And once it touches you, you're no longer free.

Never. Free.

I've seen first-hand of how fucked this world truly is. I was just a kid when I was dragged into the cruel clutches of it, forced to see the things no child should ever witness. I remember the cold rooms where dirty secrets were kept, the hushed voices, the fear that clung to the atmosphere like smoke. There were places hidden from daylight, buried in the sinister underbelly of society, where people traded innocence like currency.

I’d seen it all: the hollow eyes of kids who’d forgotten what it was to feel safe, the bruises, the whispers, the screams, the scars hidden beneath long sleeves. I learned quickly that people will do anything to protect themselves, to bury the things they’d rather pretend don’t exist.

And the worst part? Nobody wanted to see it. Nobody wanted to admit what was really happening. They still don’t. Nothing has changed in fifteen long fucking years, if anything it’s gotten worse.

But at least I can say I cleared two of them off these fucking streets—my parents. They may have given me life, but they poisoned it, shattered it, all for business deals, supremacy, their satanic rituals, and whatever sick, perverted thrill they could squeeze from it. They were supposed to be my protectors, my fucking foundation. Instead, they sold me the fuck out, wrapped me up in a realm of darkness and fucking sacrifices.

Killing them wasn’t just revenge—it was a purge. My parents didn’t just ruin my life; they left scars on this world, on so many others, fed into a system that was hurting innocent children and maybe I can’t undo the damage they caused, but at least I made sure they’d never hurt another soul again.

But I’m not finished. Oh, no. My parents were just the beginning. Every last one of them that rotates that ring, all those sick, disgusting cunts—they’re next. They think they’re safe. They think I’ve forgotten, or I’ll be quiet, but they can’t hide behind their wealth, comfortably tucked away in their dark little corners any longer.

I’m coming for them, one by fucking one. They’ll all burn in hell, and I’ll be the one to light the fucking fire.

My eyes move over my parents’ grave one last time, slowly and carefully before I decide to stand. I glance over the cemetery until my gaze settles on Raven’s house. I think about going over there to collect some of her stuff until I see that young woman from the bar trying to knock at her door. I raise an eyebrow, careless before turning around and strolling toward the woods again.

…

Walking deeper into the forest, I begin counting as I pass the trees, each number anchoring me to a memory buried somewhere deep in the chaos of my mind. Steps, distances, landmarks—it all had to line up. When I come

across a tree, warped and bending like a silent sentinel, I stop dead in my tracks.

“The south side... seven inches deep,” I mutter, my thoughts scrambling to piece together the events of that day, the fragments of a plan set in motion long before the blood ever spilled.

Circling the tree, I toss my bag onto the muddy ground and dig through it, pulling out a small garden shovel. The blade bites into the wet earth, and I dig relentlessly. The tension rises until the sound of metal scraping against something solid breaks through the air.

“Fucking bingo,” I whisper, a cold smile tugging at my lips.

I drop the shovel and claw at the soil with my hands, pushing it aside until the shape of a black box emerges from the earth. My fingers hook into the edges, and with one final tug, I free it from its muddy tomb. Glancing around the deserted woods to make sure I’m still alone, I return my attention to the box, swiping away the dirt embedded in the engravings.

The rusted lock snaps open with a creak, and I slowly peel the lid back. My head dips closer, my breath fogging in the crisp air as my eyes narrow, taking in the contents. Stacks of money, glittering jewelry, diamonds—anything of value that I could stash away to secure some of my future.

Premeditated murder? Absolutely. But no one ever knew that.

Two weeks before that harrowing night, I started planning. As soon as she went missing, my thoughts spiralled into an abyss, each one darker than the last, until they distorted into something evil. Killing them was set in stone. Every sign pointed to her murder. Hurt me in the most horrific ways all you want, but not her. So, I started collecting. Planning. Preparing.

This box was more than just a stash—it was insurance. I knew if I killed them, I’d be left with nothing. It wasn’t greed that drove me; it was common sense. Without them, I’d be on my own, with no one to fall back on, no resources to fund the path I was carving for myself. A path of blood, vengeance, and control. To be honest I feel fucking disgusted using their shit money, but I will get great pleasure spending it for my warpath and disappoint them even more from beyond the grave.

I push some of the stuff inside the box aside until my fingers brush against an old, worn photo. I gently pull it out, the edges frayed, and the

colors faded. But It’s us. Together. Back when we were kids.

My Adam’s apple bobs as I stare down at it, a lump forming in my throat that’s almost impossible to swallow. I haven’t seen her face in over fifteen years. The memories of what she looked like had already started to blur. But here she is, pulling me into the past. Frozen in time. Innocent. Untouched by the horrors that came later.

My chest tenses, the edges of my vision growing misty. The burn in my eyes is unexpected, a harsh reminder that there’s still some piece of me—some weak, human part—that refuses to die, no matter how much darkness I drown myself in. And that piece? It’s why I’m fucking doing all of this. It’s why I can’t stop, won’t stop.

I take a deep inhale and place the photo gently back into the box, my hands lingering for a moment before slamming the lid shut. The sound echoes through the empty woods, snapping me back to the present. I shove the box deep into my bag, zipping it up with jerky movements before slinging it over my shoulder.

After kicking the dirt back into the hole, ensuring it looks untouched, I head back toward the mansion. The air feels heavier as the towering structure looms in the distance. As I pass it, my gaze flicks upward briefly, to where Raven is locked inside. It’s eerily silent—no cries, no protests. Just stillness.

I keep moving, my boots crunching against the gravel and orange leaves until I reach the backyard. The garden shed sits there like a forgotten room, its wooden frame weathered by time and neglect.

Shoving my shoulder hard against the stiff door, I push it open, the hinges groaning. Dust dances in the thin slivers of light streaming through the cracks. The air smells of damp wood and rust. My eyes scan the space, taking in the shelves cluttered with old tools, and a few cobweb-covered bottles. Then my gaze lands on it.

An axe. A beautiful fucking axe.

It’s mounted on the wall, standing out amongst the clutter like a masterpiece in a gallery. The handle is long, black, and smooth—polished wood with a grip around it that’s both sturdy and elegant. The blade is deadly sharp and silver as it glints in the light.

I step forward, reaching out with both hands. When my fingers curl around the handle, it feels natural, almost too natural. I lift it from its place on the wall and test its weight, letting the cool steel rest in my palms, adjusting my hold as I swing it lightly. Perfect balance. Perfect weapon.

…

After hours of walking deep through woods, dragging the heavy axe beside me, it’s starting to get dark, and I end up at the edge of where I need to be. The steel mill stands worn but functional, its chimneys releasing thin wisps of smoke into the fading sky. Rust streaks its framework, and some metal sheets hang loose, but lights flicker in a few windows, giving a sign that works are inside, along with the occasional clang of metal echoing faintly.

Hundreds of shipping containers are stacked in uneven rows across the lot, their paint chipped and faded, but signs of use are clear—greasy marks on handles and chains coiled nearby. A few forklifts sit idle, dirty but newish.

The rocky shoreline to my right is loud with crashing waves, the low sunset reflecting off the water in streaks of orange. Figures move here and there by the mill, their movements purposeful but quiet, giving the place a guarded, almost secretive atmosphere. It’s not abandoned—it’s a place running on intent.

I did wonder if he was still here, and it seems he is. This place ain’t new to me. My father brought me here once or twice—too many times for a child to see things no child should. But it wasn’t anything new. I’d seen a lot worse by that point. At first glance it might seem just like an ordinary steel mill, still clinging to life with its running machines and faint signs of production. But I know better. This isn’t just a fucking steel mill. It’s a front in this town, a carefully constructed screen hiding the truth of what’s really going on.

This is a hub—a place where people are trafficked. Kids specifically, smuggled in or out, passing through like fucking cargo. They leave the machines running, masking the horrors that unfold when darkness falls. This is just one link in a chain, one stop in a network stretching far beyond this place.

And tonight, I’m here for a fucking reason. I need answers—a location and a date. The man running this shithole has the information I’m looking for, and when I’m done with him, he won’t have a choice but to give it to me.

I drop my backpack onto the ground behind the tree, yanking my sweaty hoodie over my head and tossing it inside, leaving me shirtless. With a steady hand, I pull my black ski mask over my head and reach for my axe, strengthening my hold on the handle. Scanning the area, I count the workers—four, maybe five—scattered around to keep the machines running. And him. The man I came for. He’s inside, no doubt. Waiting patiently for the next load of kids to arrive so he can make a hefty wad of cash.

My eyes harden, a calmness settling over me as I step out from the shadows. The weight of the axe swings at my side, every stride measured and slow as I cross the lot carelessly.

When I reach the metal stairs along the side of the building, I climb swiftly but quietly, the sound of my boots against the steel lost in the industrial buzz. At the top, I find the rusted door and my fingers curl around the handle.

As I step onto the upper platform walkway, the scene below stretches out like a mechanical labyrinth. My eyes sweep the area, mentally calculating where everything is placed. Where they could run. Where everything could go wrong or right. A massive molten furnace dominates one corner, the heat strong, even from where I’m standing. Chains hang from overhead steel beams, swaying faintly. The air is thick and harsh, a mix of burning metal and grease.

I glance around the platform, every shadow shifting under the glow of lights. No movement. I step forward cautiously, my boots rattling faintly against the steel walkway. Then, without warning, the door to my right creaks open and a man almost steps through.

My body reacts on instinct and without warning, I turn quickly with my axe high above my head, my grasp strong, and my focus locks onto the unlucky cunt in front of me. His face barely registers shock before the blade slams down with savage force. The nauseating crunch of bone echoes in my ears as the axe cleaves deep into his skull, splitting halfway through his head in one brutal motion.

Hot blood sprays, coating my skin, igniting the darkness I crave inside me as I let out a guttural snarl. I shift my grasp on the handle, teeth gritted, and yank downward with raw, violent strength. The sound is wet and vile—a grotesque symphony of tearing flesh and splintering bone until it's through the middle of his neck. His skull doesn't just crack; it parts wide open like a fucking peeled banana, exposing his brain inside.

His body collapses in a lifeless heap as soon as I yank my axe free with a grunt, blood pooling at my feet. I inhale deeply, getting ready for more, when a faint gasp cuts through the buzz of the steel mill. My head snaps to the side eerily, murderous eyes narrowing as I spot another victim standing there, some distance away.

He's frozen for a split second before panic takes over and he stumbles backward, boots skidding on the platform. He turns and sprints like his life depends on it—because it fucking does.

There's a crazed axe murderer on the loose and he's about to end his fucking life.

My gaze calmly follows him, head tilted to the side as he bolts, his target clear: the bright, looming alarm button on the wall and my brow arches.

Just as his arm stretches out, I raise my axe high above my head, blood dripping from its steel edge and streaking down my arms. I swing it back, then hurl it forward with every ounce of my strength and the weapon spins, slicing through the air with a deadly accuracy. The crack is deafening when it strikes, smashing into his back with a repulsive thump. His spine crumples inward under the power, and the impact sends him flying across the platform like a fucking rag doll.

I stride toward him as a malicious smirk stretches across my lips. *Well, this is fucking fun.*

I take out one or two more, their screams fading as quickly as they began. The adrenaline courses through me, sharpening my focus, and that's when I finally see him.

He steps out of a room across the platform, oblivious to the carnage I've created, a pair of heavy-duty headphones clamped over his ears. He's humming to himself, bobbing his head slightly, the fool completely unaware of the blood-soaked nightmare surrounding him. My lips curl into

a cruel grin as I grip my axe tighter, my fingers sticky with gore as I move toward him.

But as I close the distance, something shifts in the air—he senses it. A sudden primal instinct kicks in, and the motherfuck glances back over his shoulder. His face twists into a mask of terror as his eyes land on me, drenched from head to toe in crimson before he suddenly runs.

I don’t even think; my body reacts on autopilot. Impulse takes over, and I dash after him, my boots thundering against the platform as I close the gap.

He’s fast, desperate, but not fast enough.

As soon as I’m within striking distance, I shift my aim and swing the axe low, slicing cleanly across his Achilles tendon.

The blade bites deep, tearing through it like butter and he lets out a blood-curdling scream. It sends him crashing forward, sprawling onto his stomach before he skids across the blood-slicked metal, leaving a trail of red in his wake.

I slow my pace, enjoying the moment, watching as he writhes and claws at the ground, trying to pull himself forward like a wounded creature.

“Time and date of the next sacrifice, cunt. That’s all I want,” I rasp, my voice hoarse, my lungs heavy and suffocating in this hot atmosphere.

His body jerks, and with a sudden movement, he flips onto his back. A glint catches my eye — something in his trembling hand. When I realize it’s a gun, my reflexes take over again and I swing the axe, severing his hand at the wrist. His scream spikes higher, more animal than human, but I barely register it.

The bastard is already wasting my fucking time.

I kick the gun and his hand away, sending it skidding off the edge of the platform. The furnace looms low beside us, its molten heart a swirling pit of fiery rage, and a torturous idea flickers in my mind.

Above, a thick, rusted chain hangs, its metal groaning with every creak. To my right, the button sits, glowing a faint red, as if it too can sense the horror about to unfold. Without hesitation, I slam my palm down on it, and the chain descends.

When it’s within my reach, I yank it down and pull it tight around his wounded ankle before connecting the hook and his cries grow more dramatic, which only pleases me. As soon as I’m finished, I stand upright, watching as his body squirms beneath me. The button calls to me again, and I press it with a loud smack. The machine groans to life, and the chain begins to drag him upward. His screams scrape against my sanity, but they only fuel the chaos that bubbles inside me.

“You’ve got around twenty seconds to give me that time and date, Bob, or your foot will rip apart, and you’ll end up in that molten hell below,” I shout over the roar of the machinery and his frantic cries.

He dangles helplessly in the air, blood pouring from the stump of his severed arm and I almost think I’ve gone too fucking far, so far that I might not even get the information.

The moment he hovers over the molten pit, I hit the button again to stop the chain, watching the terror flood his face, his eyes wide with the realization of what’s to come.

His life is a thread, and I’m holding the fucking scissors.

“The White Woods!” he wheezes, barely able to form the words. I lean over the railing, holding the metal hard, my eyes cold as I let the name settle in. I know that place. But I need more.

“Time and date, motherfucker,” I growl, almost purring with sadistic pleasure.

“Two days! Midnight!” he screams, “Please! Help me!”

His face contorts as he begins to feel the strain on his shredded ankle. I watch the tear deepen, the flesh giving way under the pressure.

All I do is raise an unbothered eyebrow and wait.

The seconds stretch, and then, just as the Achilles tendon snaps with a revolting, final tear, his body jerks as he screams one last time. And then, he plunges. The final scream is gradually swallowed by the furnace’s roar as he plummets into the molten below. His body disintegrates almost instantly, the sound of him melting alive a haunting melody that echoes in my mind long after it fades.

Another one sent to hell.

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CHAPTER TEN

Raven

The bathroom feels even smaller in the dark, the cold seeping into my bones as I sit pressed against the radiator. Midnight is curled up beside me, her soft purring the only sound to keep me company. My head rests on the metal, and my eyes are heavy with tiredness, but my thoughts won't stop racing.

When will he come back? What if something happened to him? What if I'm left here to rot?

I try to shake the thoughts away, closing my eyes briefly, when suddenly, a loud bang echoes from somewhere downstairs. My head snaps up, my heart jolting before hammering wildly in my chest.

The room feels suffocatingly silent as I try to hear anything else. Then it comes—the gradual thud of footsteps, each one heavier than the last. Something drags along the floorboards, the noise grating against the quiet like nails on a chalkboard. I stop breathing as my wide, fearful eyes lock onto the door.

The footsteps stop outside, and for a moment, the world seems to stand still. The doorknob turns, agonizingly slow until it finally cracks open, and a flickering light spills into the room. My body tenses as the glow grows brighter, illuminating his silhouette.

His head is bowed as he steps inside, and I instantly notice his shirtless body is drenched in blood, streaks of crimson covering his arms, chest, and face. His black jeans are smeared with dark stains, and his boots leave muddy prints in his wake. In his other hand, he drags a bloodied axe, the blade gleaming even beneath its macabre coating.

He doesn't look at me, doesn't even say a word. He strides across the room with a strange calmness, as if the blood on him is nothing more than

spilled paint. He sets the large candle on the floor in the far corner, its flame dancing.

I can’t tear my eyes away from him as I pull my legs in closer to my chest, and rest my chin on my knees, trying to make myself as small as possible. Midnight stirs beside me, letting out a soft mew, but I don’t dare move.

What the fuck has he done now? Where has he been? Who’s fucking blood is that? My questions whirl in my mind, but I’m too scared to ask. Too afraid to do anything but watch him.

Ty’s head tilts slightly, just enough for his gaze to pierce through the strands of black hair hanging over his eyes. His expression is blank, but the sinister energy radiating from him is suffocating, heavy enough to crush the air from my lungs.

He turns his body, moving toward me as the screech of the axe drags along the tiles, sharp and grating.

When he reaches me, he just drops to his knees in front of me, his towering frame casting shadows over me. Midnight bolts out of the room as soon as the handle of the axe hits the floor, the jingle of her collar fading quickly as she disappears into the night.

My heart leaps at the sound, and I instinctively yank at the handcuffs in desperation, the cold bite of the metal cutting into my already sore wrists, but Ty’s unsettling presence drags my attention back to him.

I can see the gleam in his menacing eyes as he lifts his chin, his hand moving to the buckle of his belt. My heart pounds harder, my mind racing to process what’s happening, even as my body refuses to move. His intentions are clear, undeniable.

“Spread your fucking legs as wide as you can,” he demands, and I just stare at him, stiff.

When I don’t obey, his fingers slide down the zipper of his jeans, the sound unnervingly loud in the silence between us.

“You either do it or I’ll cut them the fuck off and look at your pretty cunt anyway. It’s your choice, Raven.”

“Are you going to rape me?” The words leave my lips in a breathless whisper, a tear tracing the curve of my cheek.

I never thought I'd find myself here, wondering if the man I once saw as my protector against Billy and Mike is now the one who threatens to break me. Strangely, my heart hurts with disappointment and I don't know why.

"No, Kitten. I'd never," he murmurs, his deep voice smooth, but there's something menacing beneath it. "I just need to see you," he groans, tugging and adjusting his hard cock in his jeans, "I need to see your pussy so fucking badly."

My eyes drop to where his hand disappears inside the waistband of his black boxers and my pulse stutters. *Fuck*. He wants to get off over me.

What the hell is happening?

The blood, the candlelight, the intensity in his stare—it's all pushing me, pulling me, a magnetic force that makes it harder to fight. Maybe if I give him what he wants, it'll somehow be my ticket out. Or maybe I'm just fooling myself.

I force my throat to work, swallowing against the dryness that's taken over. My legs tremble as I gradually and stupidly part them, letting them fall wide open, each movement feeling like a surrender I can't stop.

His gaze falls to my exposed pussy as soon as I obey, and I watch his reaction shift. His eyes darken, pupils dilating, and his lids lower just enough to show a flicker of something hungry. His lips part slightly with a small exhale escaping him as his hand moves, tugging at his hard cock. When he yanks it out of his boxers, my eyes lock on the way his large, bloodied hand grabs it—big, thick, veiny, heavy. Fucking mouthwatering perfection. The sight commands my attention, like a gravity I can't resist.

As his hand begins to move up and down, unhurried at first, the skin pulls back to show the slick precum at the tip, and the reveal of his arousal burns into me.

Something stirs deep inside, unwelcome but undeniable. Heat blooms low in my belly, spreading like wildfire consuming me. I try to smother it, to shove it back into the dark corners of my mind, knowing this is wrong, but every stroke of his hand, each quickening motion, destroys something inside me.

His eyes roam over me—my face, my body, lingering on my pussy like a hunter wanting to taste its victim. I can see it in his gaze: the fantasizing,

the wanting, the claiming. And worse, I feel it in myself. *Fuck.* Why is this turning me on so much?

My eyelids grow heavy, weighted with a desire I can't seem to control. The pressure in my core builds to a near-unbearable peak, and then I feel it—come slipping out of my hole, a response I can't stop even if I tried. It's humiliating, intoxicating, and uncontrollable all at once.

He's fucking doing something to me, something that bends my body against my will. The way his eyes rake over me, dark and consuming, feels like a touch—like he's already deep inside me without laying a hand on my skin.

He sees it—sees everything. The way my chest rises and falls in sync with his, the way my legs tense each time his hand slides down his solid dick before coming back up.

He knows. Knows how my thoughts are just as disturbing as his.

After what feels like an eternity of his gaze fixed on my core, he begins to edge toward me on his knees. The edging sends a shiver through me, but I don't flinch. I can't. Every part of me seems to welcome him.

In seconds, he's between my spread legs, his free hand splaying flat on the floor beside me, grounding himself as his weight presses closer. My head tilts back instinctively, his face hovering inches above mine, his lips so near I can almost taste the heat of his breath.

"I see your cunt is weeping for me, little kitten." He groans.

His strokes grow harder, faster, the sound sharp in the thick silence, and the cold air between us ripples against my exposed pussy. My body arches involuntarily, a desperate response I can't control. He's pleasuring himself while I'm left here—my hands cuffed to this damn radiator, helpless to do anything but watch. The unfairness of it sears through me.

"Kiss me, Ty. It'll make you cum harder." I say, my words breathily and alluringly.

His gaze flickers to my mouth, lingering there before meeting my eyes again. He licks his lips lightly, then tilts his head to close the gap between us without hesitation. My eyes flutter shut just as his lips brush against mine—soft at first, featherlight, like a warning. Then, they press firmly, and

the connection fires a shiver cascading through me, tingling from head to toe.

Our lips part, and his tongue slips into my mouth, unsure at first, before meeting mine in a clash of heat and urgency. The taste of him floods my senses—tobacco, blood, and something darker.

The kiss deepens, gradually growing feral, and our tongues battle for dominance. He's ruthless, but a damn good kisser who leaves me panting and desperate for more. His hand tangles in my red hair, grabbing a fistful and yanking my head back, exposing my throat and pulling me further into him. He shoves his tongue deeper inside, almost reaching my tonsils, a low growl reverberating in his chest as his control frays from the taste of me.

Then I feel it—the head of his cock brushing against my pussy. The contact sends a jolt through me, my legs twitching before my hips buck toward him, drawn by the sensation. He drags it over my clit, his movements more eager now as he jerks himself off harder. His heavy breaths fan across my lips, but he doesn't stop, he kisses me again, hungrier this time, as if devouring me isn't enough.

The moment is raw, charged, and something about knowing this might be the first time he has ever had his cock on pussy, makes me feel things, things I haven't felt before.

His dick slides down my wet slit torturously, until he nudges just the tip inside my soaked hole. The stretch is small but so frustrating, a tease that has my brows knitting together as my body strains.

He holds back, refusing to give me more, his control the only thing that matters. He's making me want him and it's fucking working. His mouth claims mine with a bruising dominance, his kiss as punishing as it is everything I want, all while he continues to toy with me—only giving me the head of his cock, nothing more.

The torment overwhelms me, his shallow thrusts coaxing moans from deep in my chest, muffled against his lips. The sound of my wetness echoing into the room betrays how he's unravelling me, piece by piece.

And then, suddenly, I feel it—his cum, hot and powerful, shooting into me and coating my walls as his body tenses against mine. The tip swells inside me, a maddening pulse just a few centimetres away from the spot where I ache for him most. The pressure coils stronger, a silent plea

building inside me, but he doesn’t move deeper—doesn’t give me what I need.

His forehead presses against mine as a growl escapes his throat, steadying himself in the aftermath of his release, his breath hectic and rough as it fans across my lips.

When he’s finished, his dark eyes slowly open, locking onto mine. We hold each other’s gaze, scanning for something neither of us says aloud. The silence stretches thin, and just as I think I might speak, he pulls away without a word.

The sudden absence of his heat is jarring, and I feel cold, exposed. My legs instinctively draw together as he tucks himself back into his pants and rises. He grabs his axe, turns and strolls away, leaving me alone. I listen out for him as my mind spirals—questioning my life choices, what comes next—while my body deceives me, still desperate to come.

When he returns, Midnight is perched on his shoulder, her claws digging into his skin, but the pain doesn’t seem to bother him. Instead, he drags my suitcase into the room and my brows knit together in confusion while shifting my gaze between him and the suitcase.

“You went to my house?” I ask quietly.

He nods, “Stopped by on my way back here. Figured you’d probably need your girly shit and fresh clothes,” he says blankly before stepping toward me.

My body stiffens as he crouches but with a soft click, my wrists are free before he shoves the cuffs into his pocket. I pull my arms forward, wincing as I rub the sore skin. I glance up at him, searching his face for answers I’m not sure I want.

“Clean yourself up, freckles. I’ll be back.”

I blink expressionlessly at him, my mind numb before his hand lands on the side of my head, his thumb sweeping across my cheek with an eerie tenderness.

“Be a good girl for me and the cuffs will start to be non-existent. You can be beside me freely.”

I feel like he’s testing me, and despite the fear tightening in my chest, I’m oddly willing to play along. I give a small, reluctant nod in response. Ty

watches me for a second longer as if searching for something hidden, but when he finally seems satisfied, he stands and takes Midnight with him, leaving the bathroom and locking the door behind him.

I stand on unsteady legs, trying to make sense of everything that just happened between us before I move toward the sink, hoping to get washed and into some fresh clothes.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

Ty

After washing myself and getting into some fresh sweatpants, I've just finished securing thick planks of wood over a window in a pretty decent room with a nail gun to trap in the warmth from the burning fireplace. I set the tool down on the floor with a quiet thud and my gaze shifts to Midnight, content as she eats from her bowl, a small makeshift bed resting beside her.

This is all temporary. In a few days, I'll move us—me, Raven and Midnight. We're going on a little road trip. It's about time she sees the world, sees me, for what I really am.

The sudden chime of my phone breaks the silence, and my brows furrow as I look down. I pull it from my pocket, scanning the lit-up screen. My eyes narrow at the message:

[Messy as fucking always,, Ty.]

Who the fuck's this?

I don't know anyone. I don't even have contacts on this phone—it's the first one I've ever owned, and I'm barely learning how to use the fucking thing.

A faith noise from the bathroom catches my attention and my gaze snaps to the open door, my body tensing on impulse. I let out a long huff and shove the phone back into my pocket, pushing the message to the back of my mind, for now.

I storm toward the door, my mind racing with the likelihood that Kitten might be trying to escape me. My hand grasps the doorknob, and in a swift motion, I unlock it and shove it open. She flinches, jumping back instantly, her eyes wide with surprise.

I pause at the threshold, my gaze sweeping down her—still wearing my black hoodie, her legs bare except for the black socks she added. There's a

flicker of something in my chest, a mix of possessiveness and... something else. Probably the fact I still want to fuck the life out of her.

She tucks a strand of red hair behind her ear, almost revealing her raven tattoo, her movements hesitant. “I hope you weren’t expecting your hoodie back,” she says, her voice soft, her gaze avoiding mine and it takes everything in me not to smirk at how she’s trying to hide the vulnerability beneath her words.

“It’s comfortable,” she continues as she tugs it down her thighs, her chin lifting as she finally meets my eyes. There’s a quiet challenge in her gaze, a spark of defiance, and I can feel my control slipping just a little more.

I pushed her to the edge, just so she could feel what I feel every damn time I look at her. I teased her, making sure she felt every craving building between us. And I could see it in her eyes—she wanted more, needed more. She wanted me to fuck her into oblivion and make her come.

But It’s all part of my strategy, my cruel, manipulative game. Each move, each touch is a step toward making her need me, making her want every part of me—the dark, the sick, the madness in my mind. She doesn’t know it yet, but soon she’ll be tangled up in me, and when that happens, she’ll want it. All of it, not choosing to escape me.

Yeah, it’s killing me too. I need her, even more now I’ve tasted her, seen her. I want her so damn badly. Every second I’m in the same air as her, I feel like I’m losing my fucking mind. I want to destroy her, fuck her until the sound of her screaming my name is the only thing echoing in both our minds for eternity. But I know—I know—the end result will be worth the blue balls.

I stare at her, my mind racing back to how her wet pussy felt against my cock and how she clenched around the tip, it all floods back. I reach out quickly, my hand locking around her wrist and drag her behind me, my pace fast as I lead her to the room I’ve prepared for the next few days.

Her small feet patter against the cold wooden floor, her pace struggling to match mine as I pull her along. When we reach the door, I yank her inside and lock it behind us. I release her wrist without a word, turning and walking toward the warmth of the fireplace. I settle onto the floor, pulling my backpack closer and unzipping it. I feel her presence edging moving toward me, her curiosity clear.

I start unpacking Tupperware containers of premade pasta and other food I got from the store today, placing them on the floor in front of me. It’s not much, but it’ll give us the energy we need. We’ve got chaos ahead.

I watch from the corner of my eye as she carefully sits a few feet away, opposite me as I set a plastic set of cutlery down for her.

“Eat.” I order without looking at her.

She settles onto her knees, wary of the situation, but I continue to pull out a couple of cold beers. I need a fucking drink. This freedom is going to be the death of my liver. After yanking the tops off with my teeth, I set them down and light a cigarette.

Kitten from the corner of my eye, stares at me, but she does eventually start eating, knowing she needs it. As I smoke, I observe her now and then through the haze, her head bowed, taking small bites of the pasta in silence. I wonder what’s racing through her mind. I’ve already gotten under her skin, that much is obvious. But what else is she thinking?

“Do you have family waiting for you back home, Kitten?” I ask, taking another drag of my cigarette, testing the waters. I need to know if anyone will be looking for her.

Her chewing slows, her head still lowered. She takes a moment, then swallows before giving a small shake of her head.

“No, I’m on my own.” Her voice is calm, then her eyes flick up to meet mine. “Don’t worry—no one will be trying to find me.”

It’s like she’s reading my thoughts, peeling back my intentions before I can mask them. But that’s what therapists do. They weigh every answer, every question. Calculated. Precise. They’re as careful as the psychopaths they deal with, treading the same dangerous waters.

But I don’t want her to be my fucking therapist. I want her to see me for who I am beneath the diagnosis. I want to strip away her polished armor and see the raw, real person underneath. I want to see her as if no one if watching. Like I’m not watching.

“What happened to your parents?” I question.

She shrugs, closing herself off and I can see the unease creeping through her, stiffening her spine. I grab a beer and flick it across the wood floor

toward her. The bottle scrapes against the grain, stopping just by of her hand.

Her eyes dart to it, then back to me and there's a beat before she picks it up, taking a long swig with her head tilting back, throat working as she drinks. God knows she probably needs it.

"They're dead. My mom died when I was young," she says simply when she's finished, her tone a mirror of my own detachment. "And my dad, he…" She trails off and I feel my brows pinch. "He killed himself three years ago."

I just stare at her as she avoids eye contact, but I can see it's something that upsets her. Unfortunately I can't relate. I wonder how she feels, knowing I willingly took both of my parents' lives, when she lost hers without warning. She doesn't know my reasons, but one day she will and maybe she'll understand or maybe she won't.

"I guess that's why I wanted to get into all the mental health side of things…" she admits, pulling her sleeve further down her arm with a shrug and I observe her carefully, thinking about what she's telling me.

"You didn't know he was unwell?" I ask curiously, wanting to delve into the dark mind of the woman I'm obsessed with.

She shakes her head once before letting out a deep sigh.

"Nope. I didn't even get a reason or a note. I was just the one who found him and picked up the pieces after." I soak in her words, and she continues, "I fell into some deep depression for a while, but clawed my way out and here I am."

My chin raises slightly, something stirring inside me at her confession. My kitten has felt the darkness. That's why she went to that asylum. She was using it as a power to try to help others. To help herself.

Interesting. Maybe that's why I'm drawn to her.

I watch as she lowers the bottle onto the floor, then I flick my cigarette into the fireplace and grab my fork, stabbing at the pasta idly.

"I know you said you have no one when we were in SHA," she says, her tone laced with interest now, switching the conversation to me. "But does that mean no one? No grandparents, no cousins? Not even a friend?"

I pause, my fork dragging through the sauce as I think about how to answer, my eyes staying locked on the food even as I finally speak.

“No one at all,” I say, the truth cutting through the air. “I did have a little sister once.”

From the corner of my eye, I see her freeze mid-bite, her gaze snapping to me.

“Did?”

I look at her, meeting her gaze head-on. “Did.”

Her expression softens, the hardness in her eyes giving way, showing her sensitive side that I strangely like. She looks down, her voice quieter now. “What happened?”

The memories scraping their way up spine and I weigh my options—whether to open up just enough to pull her closer or shut her out entirely, keeping my edge intact.

“She’s dead.”

Kitten tilts her head slightly, studying me with those sharp, blue eyes of hers. She knows there’s more, and I can feel her thinking about my words, trying to make sense of them.

“She went missing,” I say finally, my voice cold and clipped. I drag the fork through the pasta again. “*Poof.* Never to be seen again.”

“Was this before…”

Her voice trails off as my eyes snap to hers, the intensity in my stare stops her mid-sentence and her lips press into a thin line. She looks down, her fork toying aimlessly with the pasta.

I force myself to relax, feeling the tension drain from my shoulders as I exhale a silent, defeated sigh. I don’t like talking about this, but the words seem to slip out anyway.

“Yeah, it was,” I mutter begrudgingly.

“I’m sorry,” she murmurs, her voice softer now. “That must have been really hard for you.”

Her words sink in, hitting a place I don’t let people reach. I think about how hard it was—how I failed. How it fucking destroyed me. I was supposed to protect her, to be the big brother she could rely on. Instead, I let

her slip through my fucking fingers. It broke something in me. Hell, it fucking made me. But it wasn't the only reason for the way I am now. There were many.

I take a bite of pasta, forcing the memories back down. Across from me, she tips her beer back, chugging it like it's water, trying to chase away her own discomfort.

I study her, every small movement pulling me in deeper. Her long orangey-red hair falls loose over her shoulders and chest, her lips parting slightly as she swallows the last of the drink. I wonder how many secrets lie beneath her pretty exterior.

I need to know more.

"Any boyfriends?" I ask, my tone laced with interest but also something darker—possessiveness.

She pauses for a moment, caught off guard, and then sets the empty bottle down without meeting my eyes, but I catch a faint smile that tugs at the corners of her lips.

"I've had a few… Not in a while though."

Her casual response ignites something primal in me. The thought of anyone else touching her, tasting her, knowing her in ways I haven't yet—it's angering. The jealousy flares hot and fast and I regret even asking. I drop my fork into the pasta with a clang, snatching my beer instead and taking a long, irritated gulp, yet the bitter taste does little to dull the rage.

"You?" she queries. Of course, she'd throw the fucking question back at me.

I tilt my head forward slightly, the bottle cold against my fingers and her eyes are on me now, waiting. I hiss through my teeth and set the beer down with a thud.

"Tell me, beautiful girl. How many cocks have you had inside that tight ass? Has anyone actually satisfied you in the way you deserve?" I murmur darkly, my eyes blackening with desire as they sweep down her body with hunger.

Her lips twitch upward, a faint, almost teasing smile breaking through as she stares down at her pasta. She's no longer eating, just stirring the sauce into lazy spirals as if the motion helps her piece together her thoughts. I can

see it in her eyes—the wheels turning, the careful consideration of what to say next.

“Tell me, psycho boy. Have you ever fucked at all?” Her blue eyes meet mine, an amused intensity in them. “How about head? How badly does your virgin dick want to cum down my throat?”

Her answer doesn’t just make my jaw tighten with annoyance—it almost gets my dick hard.

Brave little bitch.

There she is, the real her, peeking out from beneath that carefully constructed façade. A little brazen, a little mouthy, and just the kind of slut I can’t resist. My lips curl into a dark smirk as I snicker, lowering my gaze back to my food and stabbing hard at the pasta with my fork.

Of course, she’d put two and two together, assuming I’m a virgin. It makes sense. And as much as I hate to admit it, she’s not wrong. I’m a twenty-eight-year-old fucking virgin—not by choice, though.

I’m sure many women would think that a man my age who’s never fucked before would be useless, but they couldn’t be more wrong. Being locked away from the world since I was a kid has done nothing but twist and corrupt my already fractured mind.

Years in isolation gave me nothing but time—time to fantasize, obsess, and spiral into depravity. The poor woman who ends up being the first to endure me won’t just be touched by my insanity; she’ll be consumed by it. And here she is, sitting right in fucking front of me.

My cravings have evolved into something far darker, something wicked and sick. The years I spent rotting in that shithole have only sharpened the monster inside me, turned frustration into an insatiable hunger. When I finally unleash it, she’ll see. She’ll feel it. She’ll learn how deeply perverted and how irreparably deranged I’ve become. And when she does, she’ll understand—there’s no going back from me.

“Does it make me less of a man to you if I were a virgin, Kitten?” I ask, my teeth clenched, my voice low and edged with challenge. I watch her demeanor shift instantly, the playful giddiness vanishing as tension ripples through her.

“You think I can’t fuck you in a way your body needs, is that it?” I press, leaning in slightly, my eyes narrowing as I hold her gaze.

Her lips part, faltering. “No… I—”

I cut her off, my voice dark and cold. “You know, dominance isn’t something you’re taught, right? It’s not a fucking skill you pick up along the way or from screwing hundreds of women in the porn industry. Some men… some men are just born to be fucking animals. It runs naturally through their dick.”

Her breath gets lodged in her throat, and I see the flicker of something in her eyes—fear, intrigue, or maybe both.

“Through their tongue…” I murmur, my gaze tailing down to her bare legs, then flash back to hers. “Through their fingers…”

As I stare into her wide eyes, I feel it—the tight grip I’ve kept on my control beginning to snap. My darker thoughts creep in, eclipsing my restraint. The room feels heavier, the hissing fire a distant hum against the pounding in my ears.

Without a word, I let the fork slip from my fingers, the clink against the floor sounding louder than it should. Carefully, I rise to my feet, my gaze breaking from hers to focus somewhere beyond her. She stiffens instantly, her senses sharper than I expected. She feels it—that shift in the air, and she’d be right to feel that fucking way. Something is about to happen.

As I take a few steps toward her, she begins to shift back, scooting on her ass like a cornered animal. But before she can get far, I reach down and wrap my hand firmly around her throat, yanking her to her feet with an effortless pull. Her hands fly up, clutching at my wrist, her eyes expanded with shock as I apply just enough pressure to make her still.

I lean in, tilting my head until my lips ghost over hers. “Let’s see just what this virgin psycho boy can do, shall we?” I growl, my words dripping with promise and menace.

Her pretty eyes expand even further, fear flashing in them like a warning light, but I don’t give her a chance to speak. With a sharp shove, I send her sprawling onto the bed. She bounces lightly, her lips parting in a startled gasp before she scrambles onto her elbows.

I storm forward, my knees hitting the mattress as she retreats, her back meeting the headboard in her bid to escape. I lean over, grabbing her ankle and yank her back down the bed toward me.

A panicked squeak slips from her lips as I kneel between her legs. Her palms slam against my abs in a desperate attempt to push me away, but I snatch her wrists in one swift motion, pinning them above her head with one large hand, slamming them down against the mattress.

“Don’t test me, Kitten,” I hiss.

With my free hand, I reach into my pocket, pulling out the cold, metallic handcuffs and her eyes widen, the panic in her voice thick as she tries to twist away.

“Ty…” she barks, her tone trembling and urgent, but I don’t stop.

I snap one cuff around her wrist with a decisive click and before she can yank her arm back, I thread the chain through the wooden headboard and secure her other wrist. She’s pinned now, completely at my mercy, her breaths coming fast and shallow as realization sets in.

Without hesitation, I grab the hem of the oversized hoodie she’s wearing —my hoodie—and yank it upward, the fabric bunching and catching on her bound arms. The action leaves her chest exposed, her black, thin bra barely containing her heaving tits. She thrashes, her red hair falling wildly across her face as she shakes her head from side to side, trying to clear her vision, and when her eyes finally meet mine, they’re filled with a small edge of fury.

I let my gaze drag down her now-exposed body beneath me, her smooth stomach, the curve of her hips, and the black fabric of her panties that taunts me. She’s mine now, bound for me to do what I fucking want, and the hunger inside me burns hotter. Ready to take, ready to eat.

My eyes lock onto hers, a dark intensity burning between us as I lower my face, stopping just short of her trembling lips.

“Shh…” I hush. “Don’t make me duct tape that pretty mouth, Kitten. I want to hear every sound I’m about to pull from your beautiful body while I eat your pussy out.” My words come out with a desire that thickens the air between us.

Her body tenses, betraying the turmoil inside her. She's torn, teetering on the edge of her morals, and I can see it all in her wide, watery eyes.

As I don't break eye contact, my hand lowers, grazing her ribs and she jolts under my touch, her body reacting before her mind can process it. Her lips part slightly, as if about to protest, but no words come out. I can see through her, past her fucking morals, straight to the need she's buried deep.

She wants this. She's always fucking wanted this.

I've seen women before, a long time ago, but never like this—never someone I wanted to unravel, to dismantle and destroy until there's nothing left untouched. She's everything I thought she'd be and somehow more, perfect in ways that drive me even more utterly fucking insane.

I can't wait any longer; I need to see her shatter completely. My hand moves upward, rough and urgent, my fingers digging beneath the wire of her bra. I push under until I'm grabbing the entirety of her breast tightly, fingers sharply pressing into the soft flesh, and her taunt nipple grazes against my palm. Her reaction is instant; her eyes flutter shut, lips parting as a gasp leaves her, her body yearning for more.

My hard cock, strains painfully against my jeans, desperate to be inside her pussy. I growl, yanking my hand out and I shove my finger between the bust, ripping it with a sharp tug until it breaks. I push the fabric away from her skin, revealing both of her perfect tits one by one, my feral eyes fixed on the movement.

As soon as they're exposed to me, I grab one roughly, dipping down and sucking her nipple into my mouth. But I'm not soft, I'm exactly what I fucking am, rough. I devour her tit, biting sharply and sucking hard, causing her to hold in screams from the pain and pleasure I'm pulling from her squirming body.

My hand slides lower, over her trembling stomach, my fingers finding the edge of her panties. I push past it, dipping inside, until I feel the warmth of her pussy. My fingers press through her lips, exploring every part of her, smearing the wetness that drips from her little hole.

I shift quickly, pulling my hand out and sitting back on my knees. I grab the strings of the panties, aggressively pulling them down her legs, then spread her legs, pinning them down to the bed with a harshness that rattles her.

My head dips, my tongue flattening against her core and I flick it upward until I wrapping my lips around her clit, sucking on it hard. She moans loudly, louder than I've ever heard, her body struggling against the handcuffs as I start to devour her. My tongue dips inside her soaked cunthole as far as I can get, tasting her. My teeth sink into her throbbing clit and tender lips. I become rougher, drawing all kinds of sounds from her until she's panting and tethering on the edge.

When I slip two fingers inside her tight pussy, her back arches in ecstasy, her hips bucking, needing more. I twist them inside her, exploring, trying to see what gets her going and when I find her spot, I press down on it and rub roughly as I shove my fingers in and out. I growl against her, giving her clit no fucking respite as I brutalize her hole with savage plunges. She gets wetter for me, dripping all over my digits, her gasps coming out erratic until suddenly she screams out. Her entire body convulses, and she almost restricts my fingers from moving, but I continue my onslaught, driving her further into bliss.

As she still recovering, I flip her onto her front and roughing lift her hips with a swift yank before pushing her legs further apart. I grab her cheeks, spreading her wide and I dive straight back in, shoving my tongue straight in her asshole. She gasps from the intrusion, but I don't give a shit. Real men don't shy away from tongue fucking both holes. They want to taste every part of their girl.

I bite on her asshole before sucking it harshly, then press two fingers back inside her pussy. The screams that escape her are everything and it makes me worse. I become more unhinged, ramming my fingers into the deepest depths of her cunt. I give her asshole a sharp spit before standing upright and then I whirl my finger around her puckered hole. I ease it in, and she tenses of course, but she'll learn to do as she's told.

When I'm knuckle deep inside her tight, warm tunnel, I start fucking both her holes until she comes twice over, her juices dripping down onto the mattress as she screams for me. I growl, finally withdrawing my fingers, giving her a taste of what I can do. Virgin or not. Before giving the side of her ass a sharp slap causing her tired body to jolt.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

Raven

After what felt like an eternity of him showing me just how dominant he really is—and how stupid I'd been to underestimate him—I lie on my back, utterly ruined. My body is a mess of sensations: every muscle trembling, my skin slick with sweat, my chest rising and falling.

Ty reaches up, his fingers brushing against my wrists as he finally unlocks the cuffs. My arms drop to my sides, muscles aching as they flop onto the pillow like a marionette with its strings severed.

My eyes flutter shut, but the feel of him settling beside me makes them drift open again. The dark ceiling above me is a blur, the spinning of the room matching the commotion still ringing in my head.

Holy fuck. He knows exactly what he's doing—knows how to make me come apart me piece by piece. But how? How did he utterly destroy me with nothing but his tongue and his fingers, leaving me gasping like a woman on the brink of psychosis?

If Ty wasn't my forbidden, psychopathic patient, my captor, I feel like I might blurt out something utterly insane—like asking him to fucking marry me right here so I could feel his type of ecstasy forever.

I turn onto my side, tucking my hands beneath my cheek as I stare at him. He's lying on his back, silent, his eyes fixed on the darkness above us. There's something in his calmness that terrifies me; it's the kind of calm that speaks louder than words, as if the demons in his head are louder than anything in the room. My gaze drifts over his scarred body—still damp with sweat, muscles taut even when he's relaxed.

My mind drifts to how he walked into that bathroom tonight. Covered head to toe in blood. He's done it again, hasn't he? Someone else is dead. And the worst part? The thought doesn't fill me with fear. It fills me with... conflict. He ravages me like I'm made for him, possesses my body and

mind as if he owns them both. And yet, he's everything I shouldn't want, everything I should run from. A killer. A nightmare. But still, I find myself screaming for him in every way that matters.

"Ty? Can I ask you something about how you came back here tonight?"

His silence is a wall, impenetrable, and I see the flicker of something dangerous in his eyes. He doesn't answer, but I can't seem to stop myself from pressing on.

"Why do you do it? All those years in SHA..." I pause, my heart hammering in my chest as his dark gaze flicks to mine. "Did you learn nothing from everything you have been through?"

For a moment, he doesn't move, then he turns onto his side. He lowers himself onto my pillow again, his face so close that his nose touches mine. His brown eyes burn into me, dragging me under, and I feel the question die in my throat.

"All I learned was how to be a better liar, Kitten. How to blend in just enough to keep them off my back. That place wasn't about helping me; it was about control, about proving they could break me the fuck down and fit me in some perfect fucking bubble," I search his eyes, listening intently as he carries on. "They put me in that sterile hellhole and prodded me, studied me, like some fucking science experiment. Like they could fix what they didn't understand. But all they did was teach me how to wear a mask and fool every single one of them."

My brows knit, confusion swirling in my mind. "What?"

"I was always a kid in a greedy man's world, Raven," he murmurs. "Even when I kept my mouth shut, they still threw the insanity book at me. Said I needed help. There had to be an excuse. So they dumped me in an asylum, a kid among killer men. They didn't care what I'd done. All they saw was another piece in their game, another way to feed the system."

He looks deep into my eyes, almost distant. "You think that was a mistake? That a kid should've ended up with those men?" His words are now soft and calm for someone who has so much bitterness inside him.

"They tried to force me to admit to things I never felt, never thought, but they forgot one thing. You put a child in a pit with wolves, he learns to bite

back. You can’t manipulate someone who has learned from the most skilled manipulators.”

I peer into his eyes, the truth settling over me like a storm. “You lied your way through that system… for fifteen years? Just to get out?” I shake my head, disbelief thick in my tone. “But that’s impossible, it’s…”

“Look at me, Kitten.” His voice cuts through my words, sharp and cold. “Do I look like I’m fucking ‘fixed’ to you?”

“But… don’t you want help? Don’t you think you need it?”

“The only people who need help—or even deserve death—are the ones who create monsters like me. The people who walk free, who hide behind their masks while making someone else the villain. Why am I the problem when they walk among the innocent like they belong there?”

He leans closer, his forehead pressing against mine, our breaths mingling, and for a moment, I feel the weight of his words settle deep into my chest.

“This,” he murmurs, “is what pain created, what cruelty made.” He pauses, his eyes dark and intense as they scan mine. “You’re looking at the result of suffering, Raven. I’m what remains when all the light is stripped away.”

A chill runs through me, his words settling over me like a heavy blanket. I want to look away, but his gaze holds me captive, daring me to understand him, to see the truth of what he is—of what he’s become. Is this to do with his sister dying? Is that what made him switch? None of this makes sense. He’s talking in riddles. But also, why didn’t Dr Moss mention his sister going missing?

“What are you trying to tell me, Ty?” I ask, my voice soft, feeling desperate for answers.

His gaze lowers, dipping just enough for me to catch the vulnerability hiding in the shadows of his lashes as they fan over his sharp cheekbones. In that moment, something inside me aches—a strange urge to reach out and touch him, to comfort him, but I know it’s a dangerous desire. Because just as much as I want to soothe the cracks in him, I also want to tear them wider. I want to peel back his flesh and see what gnaws beneath the insanity, to understand what it is that makes him this way.

“You don’t have to lie to me, Ty,” I murmur quietly, as if speaking too loudly might spook the beast in front of me. “We’re not in SHA. I’m not your therapist anymore. It’s just me and you.”

His eyes lift, his gaze steering back to mine. He doesn’t speak, doesn’t move, just stares, but when I open my mouth, about to probe him again, the pad of his thumb sweeps gently across my bottom lip, the gesture so intimate it makes my heart race. His dark eyes follow the movement, then his hand shifts, his fingers brushing through my red hair, tucking it gently behind my ear.

“Don’t worry, freckles,” he murmurs, his tone low and dripping with something that feels like both a promise and a warning. “In time, you’ll see everything for what it is. It’s nothing I can say. You have to see it to understand.”

His words wrap around me like a silk noose, soft but choking. They don’t make me feel safe—they worry me, because I don’t know what “everything” is, and with him, I’m fucking terrified to find out.

“But just know,” he breathes the whisper against my lips, “Darkness is where I belong. Where I find peace—until now, when you swarm my twisted thoughts, kitten. But never mistake my obsession with you as a weakness. I’ll drown you in my fucking shadows if it means keep you to myself.” I gaze into his dark eye as he continues. “It’s us, ‘Til Def. You’re carved into my black soul, and nothing will ever tear you out.”

I can’t look away and I don’t, stunned by his words. He’s a beautiful combination of chaos and peace all at once, and I’m starting to realize that I’m caught somewhere in the middle of his mayhem.

…

The fire crackles softly, its flickering light dancing across the room as I sit huddled close, my hoodie pulled low over my head. Dawn bleeds faintly through the edges of the wood covered windows, but the warmth of the fire is all I can feel. My mind is a storm, swirling with questions I don’t want to answer. What do I do next? Do I stay and try to make sense of him, to piece him back together?

There’s a part of me—small but insistent—that wants to try. His heart is cold, encased in layers of ice and shadows, and I can’t help but feel an ache to melt it. To fill it with something real. Something...human. But the other

part of me, the part still tethered to survival, screams at me to run. To take the first chance I get and not look back. He isn't my responsibility.

And yet, here I am. Stuck. Trapped.

He's locked me in here, and I don't know how much longer I can take it. How long can he keep this up? Days? Weeks? Until his guard slips and I find my moment? Until he's caught or even dead? My freedom feels so close and yet impossibly far.

I wrap my arms around myself, my heart heavy with contradiction. Ty isn't entirely bad. I've seen flashes of something else beneath the mayhem. He's broken, a man with pieces scattered too far to put back together. But even as I cling to that hope, I can't ignore the truth: he's sinister. A slayer cloaked in a hoodie. A killer with no remorse.

My hands tremble as I stare down at them, my fingers curled tightly into my palms. A jittery exhale escapes me, and I shake my head, trying to push back the thoughts clawing at my mind.

How can I sense goodness in a soul so dark? How can I let myself believe there's something worth saving when I've already seen the depths of his violence?

The fire hisses again, the heat creeping up my legs, but it doesn't reach my heart. That remains heavy and cold, locked in its own war. When I hear a noise outside, my head turns, and I look at the window. I gently stand and walk toward it. When close enough, I peer through the planks of wood, spotting him outside, shirtless, not bothered that it's winter.

He's chopping wood. His muscles ripple with every swing of the axe, each scar and muscle moving in harmony as the blade smashes down into the wood with such force, I feel my toes curl. I watch carefully, mesmerized, a strange heat rising inside me despite the chill.

Midnight prowls in overgrowth nearby, sniffing lazily at the frost-laden grass but never too far away from him. She lingers by his side like she's been bewitched, caught in the same pull that seems to drag me toward him.

When he finishes, he leans down, scooping the split logs into his arms with an effortless power. The axe swings easily at his side, glinting menacingly in the dull sunlight. His voice breaks the quiet as he calls out to

her, a low, commanding sound. Midnight perks up immediately, trotting after him like a shadow as he strides back toward the house.

I swallow hard, wrapping my arms around myself as my gaze sweeps over the dense, shadowed woods stretching behind the mansion.

“All I need to do is get to my car,” I whisper, as if saying it louder might break the fragile rope of hope holding me together. “I need to get out of here before I stupidly fall for him.”

The creak of the door unlocking behind me makes my entire body go rigid. When it swings open, I hear his footsteps pause. He sees me; I can feel the weight of his gaze pressing into my back. Still, I don’t turn. My fingers dig into my sides as I force myself to stay still, my heart hammering in my chest.

He steps inside, the door clicking shut behind him. His boots are loud against the wooden floor, each step closing the space between us. It’s deliberate, almost taunting, until I can feel his presence looming behind me,

I glance at him from the corner of my eye. “I was supposed to leave for work by now, Ty.” My words are sharp, meant to cut, to remind him that there’s a world outside of this. Outside of him.

He doesn’t seem bothered, doesn’t even react and the silence stretches until I finally look away.

“It looks like someone will be wondering where I am after all,” I add, hoping to shake him, to find a crack in his composure.

“Not necessarily,” he finally says, his voice low and smooth.

My brows knit together, confusion quickly giving way to dread.

“I emailed them on your behalf,” he continues, his tone casually annoying. “Said you were in an accident. That you won’t be able to continue your training.”

The words hit me like a punch in the gut, and my heart hurts. My vision blurs as tears sting my eyes, but I force them back, my lips pressing into a thin line. My posture wavers for just a moment before the fury builds, hot and overwhelming.

“You did what?” I grit, the words trembling on the edge of a scream.

He doesn’t answer, his silence heavy, almost smug, like he’s daring me to confront him. I clench my fists at my sides, my nails biting into my palms as I fight the urge to turn and meet his gaze. *He knows exactly what he’s done.*

“I fucking hate you,” I spit, each word laced with venom. My chest heaves as the wrath burns hotter, wild and unrestrained. “I’ll never be with you the way you want me to be.”

I spin around, facing him head-on, and jab my finger into the hard plane of his chest, my glare sharp. “I’d rather fucking kill myself than stay here with you, living this twisted, deranged version of life you’ve created. I’ll run before you can even fucking catch me.”

His jaw tightens, the muscle there ticking with irritation, his dark eyes flashing with something unspoken, something dangerous, but he doesn’t explode. Not yet. He stands there, taut and controlled, like he’s giving me space to throw every ounce of my anger at him. Like he’s inviting it.

“You’re living in some fucked-up lala land,” I seethe, my voice trembling with unshed tears. “You think you can just keep a woman captive, break her down, pleasure her like a damn puppet, and she’ll fall in love with you? You’re insane!”

The words come out sharper, louder, tearing through the suffocating silence between us and my throat burns as I say them, my teary eyes narrowing, locking onto his.

“I could never—NEVER fall in love with a monster who doesn’t even have it in him to love me back!” My tone cracks, the rage spilling out like poison. “You’re fucking dead inside. You’re...”

I shake my head, disgust warping my face and that’s when it happens. I see it. The hurt flashing through his eyes before he snaps.

Before I can blink, his hand shoots up, clamping around my jaw like a vice. He slams my head back against the wood with enough force to shock me, and I wince, pain radiating through my skull. My hand rises instinctively, aiming to smack him, but he catches my wrist mid-air and with one swift motion, he pins it to the window, his hard body pressing me into place, caging me.

“Stop,” I hiss, but it’s hushed by his hold, my body squirming under his power.

His dark, wide eyes search mine, their depths unreadable yet terrifying.

“Are you finished tearing more holes into me?” he asks, his tone ridiculously calm. “Like I don’t have e-fucking-nough of them already?”

Tears blur my vision until I finally let them fall, silent streaks sliding down my cheeks, but they don’t soften him. His fingers tighten around my jaw, dragging my face up to meet his.

“Don’t you fucking look away from me,” he growls, slamming my head back against the wood again—not hard enough to hurt, but enough to make me snap to attention, my eyes flying open to meet his.

“Now,” he says with a low, guttural rumble, “listen to me very, very carefully, beautiful girl.”

His tone alone makes my stomach churn, my body trembling beneath his unrelenting hold.

“Ever run from me, and I’ll make sure you never forget it—I’ll make sure you never stop feeling it.”

The promise in his words sends a shiver down my spine.

“This is your fucking warning, Kitten. When they run from me, I get a rush to spill their blood. But with you? I’d go feral just to taste every drop of your fear. And trust me, the latter is far fucking deadlier.”

I stare into his eyes, and what I see there steals the breath from my lungs. There’s no bluff, no emptiness to his threat. A sob escapes me as he unexpectedly releases me, and I lower my head. He turns, ready to leave again and I lift my wet eyes. His hand grips the door handle, the tension in the room thick enough to choke on, but the bitterness in my voice cuts through it like a blade.

“I’d sleep with one eye open if I were you, psycho boy,” I sneer, venom dripping from every word. “You wouldn’t want to meet your own fate with that axe, would you?”

He freezes mid-motion, his hold tightening on the handle. Slowly, he side-eyes me, the hint of a low chuckle rumbling from his chest. It’s

unsettling, the kind of laugh that coils around your spine and squeezes. He shakes his head slightly with amused disbelief.

“I always have my eyes open, freckles,” he says with a dangerous blend of dark humour and malice.

He turns his head just enough for our gazes to lock. “Watching you sleep,” he continues with a brow lift, “imagining how my axe would look buried deep inside your asshole while I fucked that brat mouth of yours. I wonder how you’ll walk the next day after I rearrange your fucking guts.”

The casual way he says it makes my stomach burn, the images hitting me like a smack. And then, as quickly as the smirk flickered on his lips, his expression hardens, his eyes trailing down my front with hunger.

Without another word, he yanks the door open and steps through, slamming it shut behind him with a force that rattles the old walls. The sound jolts me, and I close my eyes trying to regain my composure.

“Prick,” I mutter, reopening my eyes and wiping my nose with my sleeve.

I start to pace around the room mindlessly, my thoughts spiraling out of control, a panic attacking coming on, leaving me dizzy. My body is tense, every nerve lit like a live wire until after a moment, I stop dead in my tracks, my gaze snapping to the door.

I move toward it, every step of my bare feet quiet. My trembling hand rises, resting on the cold metal handle. Doubt creeps in for a second, his warning echoing in my ears, but I push it away, biting my lip as I press the handle.

And it clicks.

My eyes expand as I pull the door open cautiously, peering into the dimly lit hallway and the sound of running water echoes faintly—he’s in the bathroom. This is the perfect chance.

Slipping through the doorway, I tiptoe, my movements painstakingly careful. My heart pounds so loudly I’m terrified he’ll hear it, even over the water. When I make it to the top of the staircase, I pause and glance around, thinking about Midnight.

Where is she?

I start to whisper her name, but there’s no jingle, no soft meow in response. My chest knots, and I hesitate, torn between searching for her or making my escape and coming back for her with help.

Then, the bathroom door unexpectedly unlocks and panic floods my veins causing me to fly down the stairs without any more waiting around.

“Kitten!” His angry shout slices through the silence like a whip, clearing spotting me.

My breath comes out ragged as I reach the bottom, my hands grabbing desperately at the front door. I yank it hard, but it doesn’t budge. *It’s fucking locked.*

I whip around to look for another way out, but my blood runs cold. He’s standing at the top of the grand staircase, staring right at me. Soaked. Completely naked. His muscles glisten in the low light, and in one hand, gleaming and deadly, is his axe. His stare is dark and fatal, a warning for me to stay put, but as soon as he starts to descend gradually and menacingly, survival kicks in yet again.

I dart to the right, down a long hallway, my only thought to get as far away from him as possible. The hallway opens into a huge living room, and my eyes lock onto a window across the room. I sprint for it, slamming my palms against the newspaper covered glass, trying to shove it open, but it won’t move. The sound of his footsteps grows closer, unhurried but relentless.

Desperate, I grab a solid ornament from a nearby cabinet and hurl it at the window with all my strength. The glass explodes outward, shards flying in every direction. Without hesitation, I leap for the opening, grabbing the edge to haul myself through.

The jagged glass rips into my hands, slicing deep and I scream, the pain searing, but I don’t stop. I drag my body through the shattered frame, the shards tearing at my arms and legs. My skin burns as blood flows freely, staining the cold pavement outside before I hit the ground with a hard thump, the impact jarring, but adrenaline forces me to get to my feet.

My legs shake as I take off, sprinting across the yard, leaving a trail of blood in my wake. Just as I make it to the edge of the woods, I glance back, seeing him calmly unlocking the backdoor, and a new kind of terror sets in as he steps out, still naked, ready to pursue me with that axe.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. He's out of his damn mind!

I sprint through the woods, the icy air burning my lungs. The rough, uneven ground tears into my bare feet, but I don't stop. I can't stop. Darkness starts to surround me, the dense forest offering hardly any light and no hint of an escape, just an endless maze of skeletal trees.

I zigzag wildly, hoping to confuse him, taking sharp turns and doubling back, but I know I'm leaving a trail—my blood dripping steadily onto the frozen leaves like breadcrumbs for a hunter.

My heart pounds like a relentless rhythm of fear, but I don't dare glance back. I don't want to know how close he is, don't want to see his shadow weaving through the trees, inescapable.

The faint rumble of an engine pierces the silence, a beacon of hope. My ears perk up, and I push myself harder, crashing through the underbrush toward the sound until the forest breaks open to reveal an isolated, rocky, uneven road.

There it is—a rusty red truck moving along the path. Without thinking, I leap onto the road, waving my arms frantically.

"Stop!"

The truck screeches to a halt, the tires skidding slightly on the gravel. My hands slam against the warm hood, and I take a moment to gather myself, my body trembling as I drag myself around to the passenger side.

The window is down, and a man sits behind the wheel—a middle-aged stranger with weathered features. His wide eyes scan my battered, bloodied frame, his confusion quickly morphing into concern.

"Are you okay?" he asks, leaning slightly toward the open window.

I shake my head violently, gasping for air, my words tumbling out in a ragged plea. "Please... please get me out of here. Now."

His hesitation lasts only a second before he nods, his hand gesturing toward the seat. "Get in."

I yank the creaky door open and fling myself into the passenger seat. The truck smells faintly of old leather and tobacco, but it feels like sanctuary compared to the nightmare I'm fleeing. The moment the door shuts, I twist

my head back, staring into the darkness of the woods. Is he back there, watching, waiting?

The man clears his throat, his hand tightening on the wheel. “Who are you running from?”

I don’t answer, my teary eyes locked on the forest, my pulse roaring in my ears. “Just drive,” I whisper hoarsely, my voice breaking. “Please... just drive.”

And he does. The truck jolts forward faster, its engine growling as we start to leave the woods behind and for the first time in what feels like days, I feel my body relax.

But then, my heart skips a beat as soon as a figure suddenly emerges from the trees, blocking the road ahead.

Ty. Oh god. No.

My stomach drops as he stands there, naked, feet planted, like a fucking immovable force of nature. The driver slams on the brakes, the tires shrieking against the gravel as the truck jerks to a halt mere feet from Ty.

My body stiffens again, terrified that the distance between us is far too short. Ty steps closer, his movements calm, measured, his eyes never leaving mine.

He looks like a fucking monster. His bare chest rises and falls. His skin is drenched in cold sweat, his wild hair plastered to his forehead, but it’s his eyes that scare me the most—insane, unhinged, and fixed.

The man behind the wheel mutters something I can’t hear, but I don’t care. I don’t even know what’s fucking happening anymore.

I only know one thing. He’s not letting me go. He’s not going to let me escape him. He gives no fucks about any consequence.

Without warning, something dark flickers in Ty’s eyes, a wild glint that sends a chill down my spine. With a loud roar, he lifts the axe high above his head with both hands, muscles straining as he gathers every ounce of rage into the swing.

The blade twists through the air as he lets go, a blur of steel before it slams into the windshield with a deafening crack until it buries itself into the face of the man standing beside me with a sickening, wet crunch.

A petrified scream rips from my throat, pure terror flooding my veins as his blood bursts from the wound, splattering across my face in a hot, sticky spray. My body trembles uncontrollably as the air around me thickens with the stench of death.

I don’t have a second to think. My body reacts before my mind can catch up. With a frantic shove, I throw the door open, stumbling out into the cold and my legs tremble violently beneath me while I stagger back into the woods.

I keep running, my feet stumbling over the forest floor as exhaustion pulls at every muscle in my body. I need to keep going. Just a little further—if I can somehow make it to the graveyard, I’ll know where I am. I glance behind me, but he’s not there. Relief and suspicion war in my mind, but my frantic pace slows until my legs can barely hold me.

Then, the soft, babbling sound of a stream reaches my ears. My steps are unsteady as I stumble toward it, my blurred vision locking onto the shimmering water. Finally, I collapse at the edge, dropping to my knees. With shaking hands, I cup the icy water, lifting it to my parched lips, the coolness soothing my throat.

As I catch my breath, I notice a dark recess to my right—a small, cave-like hollow tucked beneath the earth. Crawling on my hands and knees, I drag my battered body into the shelter, my movements clumsy. When I’m finally tucked beneath the overhang, the world outside feels miles away, and my body gradually unwinds.

I curl into myself, pulling my knees to my chest and resting my chin on them. The thought of waiting here, letting the darkness shield me, feels safer than facing the horror outside.

I sit there, time dragging as I listen to every creak, crackle, and distant echo. The silence grows until my fear starts to morph into something bolder. I convince myself that he’s gone—for now.

Gently, I peek out. *Quiet.*

Cautiously, I sneak out of the hole, rising unsteadily to my feet. My body aches with every move, but I force myself to stand tall, brushing dirt and damp leaves off my torn hoodie. Then it happens—a single, sharp crack behind me and every muscle in my body freezes.

I feel him before I even see him, his dark presence wrapping around me like cold chains.

“Gonna run from me again, kitten?” His calm voice snakes through the quietness.

I turn, wide-eyed, my stomach dropping like a stone as I see him standing above my hiding spot, perched on the ledge. He’s massive, looming frame, and I wonder with sick dread how long he’s been standing there, silently watching me. His eyes gleam with a mix of delight and menace and as soon as he inches forward, I stumble back.

He suddenly jumps down, landing with a solid thud that reverberates through the forest floor, and I spin on my heel, running for my life, raw panic fuelling my legs as I dart through the trees.

Finally, I skid to a stop, pressing myself against the thick bark of a massive tree. I draw in gulps of air until I slap my unsteady hands over my mouth, trying to stifle the sound. I peek around the trunk, scanning the area, but there’s nothing.

My fingers dig into the rough bark for support as my knees bend, attempting to sit down, until suddenly, movement and a flash of silver.

Before I can scream, the axe swings out of nowhere, the blade slamming into the tree inches from my neck. My shriek pierces the air as the handle presses tightly across my throat, pinning me back against the trunk. I claw at it with weak, trembling fingers, trying to push it away, but the blade is buried too deep, and my strength is almost gone.

I stiffen when he rounds the tree—his naked body glistening faintly with sweat and dirt, muscles carved to perfection every inch of him screaming power. My gaze flickers downward involuntarily, catching on the sight of his cock, heavy and unapologetically hard at my face level.

He got off on the chase just like he said. Fuck. That’s me done for.

My breath falters, shame pooling in my gut as my focus lingers on his dick for a heartbeat too long. Finally, my eyes snap upward, locking onto his with a mix of defiance and fear.

His face is a perfect mask of control, but his eyes burn with a greedy hunger that rips through me. I try to composure myself, forcing my features

into a blank canvas, but my trembling limbs and the tears carving paths through the grime and blood on my cheeks betray me.

He watches me silently for a moment, his towering form still as a hunter assessing its wounded victim. Then, slowly, he begins to crouch, his movements calm, until his face is level with mine. His sharp gaze wanders over me, taking in every cut, every smear of blood, stripping me bare despite the layers of dirt and torn fabric clinging to me.

“You know what happens now, don’t you, beautiful girl?” His voice is soft, almost tender, but it carries a weight that crushes any hope of escape.

“Yes,” I whisper, the surrender trembling on my lips.

“Good,” he breathes, his eyes darkening as they flicker down to my mouth as he reaches out, his thumb brushing against my cheek.

“Just remember, Kitten,” he continues, “even if I shatter you, I’ll be the one to pick up every fucking piece and put you back together again. Every fracture, every mark—crafted by me, rebuilt by me, owned by my touch.”

His thumb sweeps across my lips now, the gesture gently as if he’s thinking about claiming my mouth and everything else, piece by agonizing piece. “Don’t ever forget that while you’re being broken.”

His thumb presses against my lips, the rough pad coaxing them apart as if testing my resistance—or relishing my obedience. The motion is intrusive, yet I can’t stop my mouth from parting and the moment it slides past my teeth, gliding across my tongue, my lips close instinctively around it with a suck. His pupils dilate as he carefully watches how my lips roll over his skin as he pushes in deeper. A growl escapes him, starved and possessive, as he pulls it out with a wet pop.

Without a word, he rises, towering over me, and my eyes stay fixed forward—still pinned to the tree—until his rock-hard cock enters my view and my mouth waters involuntarily. His hand tangles in my wet hair, twisting it at the roots and yanking my head back sharply until I meet his stare above me.

His other hand moves, wrapping tightly around his dick, stroking himself as his breathing grows heavily. He edges closer until the slick; swollen tip grazes my lips.

I hesitate, a small fight between defiance and submission, but then, I part my lips and the moment he senses my consent, he thrusts forward, shoving himself inside in one brutal motion like he can't wait any longer. The intrusion is sudden, driving to the back of my throat, making my eyes go wide as I gag, my body betraying its limits while his other hand clutches my hair, holding me there.

My fingers wrap around the axe handle as if preparing myself, my legs remaining awkwardly bent, trembling beneath me. He starts sliding in and out, his gaze locked on me, devouring the sight of my mouth stretched to the absolute limit around his big cock, the way I take him deeper each time, my suction intensifying. My tongue moves instinctively now, betraying me, enjoying the taste of him far too much.

"Fucking hell," he groans, strained, as if barely holding himself together, the words a growl, slipping through clenched teeth. "Your mouth feels so fucking good."

I can feel it—him. The pulse, the way he thickens, swelling against my tongue with each passing second, every shallow thrust. His control is breaking, thread by thread until it's gone completely.

His fingers clench, holding onto my hair more tightly, and before I know it, he's skull-fucking me. My head bangs against the bark continuously, and I have to force it back, but it makes it worse; I'm stuck, and his cock rams down my throat, past my tonsils, slamming into my windpipe, which causes my stomach to wrench. My eyes start to stream, dots forming at the edges as my mouth fills with saliva, soaking his dick and dripping down my chin.

I can't fucking breathe, I'm gonna pass out.

He's ruthless. It's as if he wants to choke me to death. His grunts above me tell me he's enjoying every second of my discomfort, his insanity slipping through the calm control he usually has. He's letting me see exactly who he will be as soon as he starts fucking.

Suddenly he pulls out, and I draw in a huge gulp of air into my deprived lungs, my entire being shaken from the brutality he just delivered on my throat and skull. He wraps his hand around the axe, ripping it from the tree, and I flinch as wood splits close to my ear. I fall to my knees instantly, my head bowed, trying to pull oxygen into my deprived lungs.

When I lift my head, I watch through blurred vision as he smashes the blade down into the hard mud, burying it deep into the earth, making it sturdy.

He storms over me, full of sexual frustration, and wraps his arm over my middle from behind before lifting me easily as if I'm the lightest thing to carry. He takes me over to the axe, dropping me on my hands and knees, manhandling me in the position he desires. He falls to his knees in front of me, snatching his solid dick, and guides himself to my lips again. I part them, and he shoves himself back into my throat, one hand tightening in my hair as I gag.

Through blurry, teary eyes, I glance up just as he spits into his fingers. His other hand untangles itself from my hair, only to come crashing down on my asscheek with a sharp crack. The sting blooms hot across my skin, and a muffled squeak escapes against the length of his cock, but before I can fully process the pain, his hand grabs me again, yanking one cheek aside with force.

His slick fingers press against my asshole, the wet heat of them circling before one slip inside. My eyes flutter closed, the forbidden intrusion sending a sinful pleasure I'm starting to love. His finger moves roughly, without hesitation, curling and swirling deep as if wanting to tear it the fuck apart. A low moan vibrates against him, my legs trembling under the ruthless assault, until he rips it out.

Both of my cheeks are spread wide now, stretched open under his hands, and as his cock drives mercilessly to the back of my throat, he forces me backward. That's when I feel it—thick, cold, pressing firmly against my wet, puckered hole.

My eyes snap open and shoot up to him. He stares down at me, his gaze full of dark desire.

"You're gonna take my axe up your tight ass and break yourself from the inside out while fuck your throat," he grits out the order, but he gives me little choice.

He continues to push me back until it's entering me, sliding down my walls. My eyes clamp shut, a whimper escaping me, the sensation painful and odd as I'm widened.

"That's my good girl," he shudders out with satisfaction. "More."

He keeps his dick lodged in my throat, making me choke until I can't take any more of the handle, fully immersed. He leans back a bit, allowing me to breathe, then his fingers dig into my spread asscheeks, dragging my walls up the handle before pressing me back down, making me that another inch deeper. I moan; I can't help it.

The more I get used to it, the better it feels, and every time he pulls me up the grip, my lips slide down his length. Soon, we're both in a wild rhythm and my moaning throat thrusts down onto him almost aggressively while I eagerly and willingly destroy my ass with his axe, fucking myself. His hands tangle in my hair, pulling at the scalp as he asserts control of my mouth.

He holds me in place before fucking my throat again, relentless and untamed. I dig my fingers into the soiled earth; my screams turning hysterical, the axe getting deeper with each plunge downward, easily slipping in and out. My legs start to shake, come streaming out of my pussy and pooling beneath me.

He yanks my hair back, then swipes it away from my face to see me better before cupping my cheeks, watching his cock being swallowed by my mouth.

"Not so pure now, are you therapist? How does it feel to get your throat fucked by your psychopathic patient in the woods while your virgin asshole is violated with his murder weapon? Slutty fucking kitten." He bites out with a beastly snarl, his feral eyes scanning my face.

"I'm going to claim and viciously wreck that messy pussy after I paint your throat with my cum, then I'm moving on to finish in that stretched-out asshole."

His filthy, degrading words have me reeling for release, my core painfully pulsing. When he lodges himself into the back of my throat, he holds me there, suffocating me as his cock swells, releasing his hot cum. I'm forced to swallow every drop, the thick fluid making my throat gurgle as I fight to stay conscious.

When he's finally finished, he withdraws and my head lowers as I cough, my movements stopping all together. He stands, moving behind me, then crouches, grabbing my cheeks and pushing me forward. The forceful

motion makes my weak arms give way, my face planting into the mud as the axe handle rips out of my ass.

He wastes no time; his long tongue plunges straight inside my open, pulsing hole, giving no fucks. A loud, shameful moan leaves my body, the feeling oddly soothing after I was destroyed by the axe. He buries as deep as he can get, tasting and swirling as he splits my cheeks wider. I greedily reach back, grabbing his hair roughly, pulling him further inside, encouraging him not to stop.

His fingers dive into my soaked pussy with a brutal stroke, making a scream escape me. He doesn't wait; he finger bangs me hard and fast while sucking my asshole. His thick, lengthy digits scrape over the perfect spot over and over. I feel my come squirt out of me with each violent drive until the pressure builds so much, I combust.

A scream tears from my throat like I'm a banshee that belongs in this forest. My hand claws at the mud as I almost rip his long hair out of his head, twisting it around my fingers. My body spasms uncontrollably, but he doesn't stop for a second; he wrecks me, pushing my orgasm to the highest peak and sending me straight to hell. Where I belong after this.

When he rips his fingers out, my come dribbles to the ground, but he stretches my pussy open with his thumbs, drinking everything he can get.

I've never felt anything like this. Jesus fucking Christ—that—THAT was shameful in the best way possible. He wasn't wrong. Virgin or not, this man knows exactly what my body needs. *This psychopath*. That's what it fucking needs.

When he finally withdraws, I shudder involuntarily, my muscles twitching as I try to lift myself on wobbly arms. My mind is spinning, caught somewhere between exhaustion and disbelief. Behind me, he rises calmly, his movements unhurried. His powerful arms wrap around my mid, and before I know it, he hoists me up, tossing me over his shoulder.

I hang limply, too drained to protest, my red hair falling like a curtain, swaying as he moves. He leans down, wrenching his axe from the earth, then he starts to walk, probably taking me back to the mansion to fuck me.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

Ty

When I enter the house, I slam the back door shut behind me, locking it with a loud, final click. My mind is spinning out of control. The chase. The blood. The overwhelming hunger to break her, to ruin her, to consume her. It's all merging together into something fucked-up, clawing at my insides like a beast.

My pace quickens. My bare feet echo on the floor as I storm through the living room, the walls of the house closing in like the boundaries of my own madness. I barrel down the hallway, my breaths coming in sharp, animalistic huffs. I don't stop—I can't stop. By the time I'm jogging up the stairs two at a time, my heart is pounding in a frenzied rhythm, my hold tightening on her and the axe.

The bedroom door swings shut behind me with a deafening bang as I kick it closed, shaking the walls. I stride toward the fireplace, adrenaline coursing through every vein. Falling to my knees, I let the axe slip from my fingers, the blade clanging against the hardwood floor. I don't even look at it. My hands move to her limp body, still draped over my shoulder like ruins of a war.

I lower her to the floor, the impact of her back and head meeting the hard boards sending a dull thud reverberating through the room. Her eyes snap open wide, filled with fear, confusion, and something else. Something charged.

I creep up her body, my blood-streaked hands on either side of her broken, battered frame, caging her in. My eyes are crazed as they rake over her, taking in every bruise, every wound, every smear of her essence on her pale, trembling skin.

Perfect. *Absolutely perfect.*

Her breathing quickens, matching the frenzy of my own. She stares into my gaze, unblinking, like a deer caught in headlights.

Without hesitation, I reach beneath the bed, my hand blindly feeling along the dusty floor until my fingers curl around the cold, solid weight of the nail gun I'd hidden there—out of her sight. Slowly, I lift it out and she pauses. Completely.

Her terrified eyes lock onto the weapon as her chest starts to rise and descend in shallow, rapid bursts. I lean closer, brushing her trembling lips as I lower the nail gun. The muzzle presses against her chin. A faint shiver runs through her body, and for a fleeting moment, her fear flares bright in her gaze, but she tries to hide it behind defiance, challenging me, testing me.

"Stay very, very still for me, kitten." I let my voice drop to a low murmur, brushing the heat of my breath across her quivering lips. "I wouldn't want to accidently shoot a nail into you."

I withdraw and lift each of her hands, positioning them just above her head. Her pulse thrums under my touch, frantic and alive, and I relish the way her bravery falters with every second.

I press its point against the soft fabric of her hoodie, tightly beside her wrist, my eyes fixed on her face. Her body tenses as soon as the loud crack of the nail echoes through the room, burying itself deep into the floorboard.

She doesn't scream. She doesn't fight. She just freezes—paralyzed by the sharp edge of fear. Another crack splits the silence, the nail piercing so close to her skin that it feels like a whisper of pain. I trail the gun down the curves of her arms and under them, tightening the material over her skin to restrict her.

After I'm finished nailing her to the cold wooden floor, I calmly place the gun beside me. She lays beneath me, body squirming to be freed. I lower my face, hovering inches from hers and she can see it in my eyes, how they're blown out with untameable desire. My dick is solid and heavy. Ready to be buried inside her pussy for the first time.

"Shhh…" I taunt, making her entire body freeze. "I've lost it, Kitten. Fucking snapped. And I'm not sorry for what I'm about what I'm about to do to you." I whisper, my gaze lifting from her lips to her eyes. "Don't be

afraid of me, I’m only gonna tear your tiny cunt the fuck up until you can’t take anymore of me.”

I lean back on my knees between her before reaching for my axe. I grab a handful of her hood roughly, dragging her small body upward before nicking a small hole in it. After setting it back down, I force my fingers inside the rip with two hands before tearing it right down the middle, revealing underneath she’s completely naked.

Her tits heave, slashes from where she cut herself on the glass mark her pure skin and it does something demented to my sick mind. I roughly grab the small of her waist, yanking her downward so she’s closer to me and her arms are tighter in the hoodie. She’s beautiful, but she would look even better painted in my blood.

I lift my axe again before pressing it to my forearm, I slash across my skin, the pain making me grunt.

“Ty!” Raven gasps, her eyes going wide with shock.

My dark gaze darts to hers, and we lock as I allow a steady flow of my warm blood to drip onto her body. I pull my intense gaze away from hers, and it gradually rakes down her naked form. When I’m done, I lay my palms on her stomach and begin to smear it upward, painting her flesh in gore. I grab her perky tits harshly, and she gasps, her back arching upward, desperate for my hands to be on her.

I dip down with a beastly snarl, the sight everything I wanted, and lick a wet trail up the center of her body, collecting the blood. When I reach her neck, she tilts her chin upward, accepting my bites and sucks on the sensitive skin, a satisfied hum escaping her. I reach down, grab my heavy, throbbing cock, and position it on her wet, little hole.

“Just remember, kitten,” I breathe into her ear. “You’re my first, and you’ll always be my last.”

I press inside her, my nose gently dragging up her jawline, and my eyes flutter shut as my swollen tip enters.

“So wet, so warm, so tight, so fucking mine.” I gasp.

Her body strains as I stretch her pussy to the limit, a silent scream wanting to snake up her throat. I continue to push forward, the sensation

shaking my body. She clenches around me, almost rejecting me, but I push through the resistance.

“Fuckkkk…” I growl, the word dragged from my chest like a roar. My head falls back, neck straining, eyes rolling as soon as I’m buried balls deep inside her, the overwhelming heat and tightness consume me.

My heavy eyes flutter open, locking onto hers as she lies beneath me, her chest heaving in time with mine. Her orbs move over my face, and the way she pulls her bottom lip into her mouth ignites something inside me. She’s not just satisfied—she wants fucking more.

Without a second thought, I dip down, crushing my lips against hers in a savage kiss that makes her pussy squeeze around me. She welcomes it, our tongues clashing wildly. I waste no time dragging my cock down her soft walls and ramming inside her again. Her loud, trembling moan vibrates into my mouth as she tenses beneath me, her tits bouncing against my scarred skin.

I sink my cock inside her violently, so far inside it feels like I’m tearing through every barrier, reaching places no one else ever could. She becomes wetter, her pussy loosening and welcoming me, molding to take every inch of my dick. *Every part of her submits.* Each scream that rips from her throat fuels the madness inside me.

With an aggressive growl, I snap completely. My arm slides beneath her thigh, lifting and bending her to my will as I throw her leg over my shoulder, trapping the other beneath me. I spread her wide, splitting her open. Her body is mine to pleasure mine, mine to control. I give no fucks.

“You will take all of me, Kitten,” I bite out. “In any way I fucking like. In a way that will have you begging for more before you even realize it.”

Lowering myself, I press my weight down on her, our bodies fusing together. Her leg stretches higher against my shoulder as I shift closer, resting my elbows beside her trembling arms. My palms find hers, my fingers locking tightly with hers above her, and I push down, pinning her.

I slam into her again, each brutal thrust pounding my cock deeper, harder, as my mouth hovers just above hers. My gaze locks on her face, watching every glimmer of emotion, every contorted expression as her body struggles to adapt to the position I’ve forced her into, how my cock tears

her tight pussy apart. But she doesn’t break—she takes it, submitting to my every twisted desire and it makes me fall for her harder.

Her fingers strain against mine, her entire body shuddering beneath me, trembling on the edge. The sight of her so overwhelmed makes balls tighten, my cock tingling with the ache of release. I bite down on the annoying fucking urge, scraping at the last shred of restraint I have, refusing to let go until she does.

“Come for me, beautiful girl,” I murmur, my lips brushing hers, my voice commanding, yet edged with a softness only she can pull from me. “Give the fuck in. Surrender to me.”

The words are a dare, an order, and a promise all at once. She spirals into hyperventilation, an untamed cry roaring from her throat before her body jerks underneath me. Her warm pussy clamps around my shaft and it makes me shoot my jizz in hot pumps.

I growl, burying my face into her sweaty neck. The feeling sweeps over my body in shivers, my legs contracting brutally. I slow down, rinsing my greedy dick for every drop inside her and when it’s over, I collapse, my weight pressing down like a brutal wave, knocking the air from her lungs.

The heat of our bodies sticks together with cold sweat and blood, our hearts slamming against each other. I can still feel the slight pulse in her twitching, wet cunt as I fight for my life, the world spinning in a haze of lust and madness.

I gradually lift my head, my eyes finding hers and they flutter open, locking onto mine. The look she gives me crackles with intensity, her gaze dropping to my lips in such a way it makes my dick jerk inside her.

She gasps before tucking her bottom lip between her teeth again, pushing my fucking buttons.

“You want more of my cock, you little slut?” I snarl, my eyes narrowing.

In a sudden, feral motion, I pull back, sitting up with a raw urgency that leaves her stunned. My hands tear at the hoodie, the fabric shredding as I free her arms with a savage impatience. The moment she’s loose, I lift her effortlessly, the surge of adrenaline making her weight feel like nothing.

My fingers curl around the handle of the axe as I rise, its cold steel a reminder of my intent. She clings to me, her arms coiling around my

shoulders.

Each step I take is heavy as I near the bed and with a flick of my wrist, the axe lands on the blanket nearby, its presence a silent threat. Then, without hesitation, I seize her waist with both hands before I hurl her onto the bed, her body landing with a breathless thud.

I grab her legs, moving her onto her front, then my warm hands run up the back of her thighs as I kneel on the bed until they're running over the curvature of her ass. I split her cheeks wide and dip down, eating her asshole again to prepare her to take my cock. A low moan escapes her lips, muffled by the mattress, as she shifts beneath me, her hips rising to give me better access. Every movement she makes feeds the fire sweeping its way through my veins.

I let a sharp spit land on her little hole, ready to destroy, then I lift her again, crawling up the bed and dragging her with me, the sheets bunching beneath us in our wake. When she's close to the headboard, I take her wrists and snap the handcuffs into place with a click. She gasps, holding the wood, her knuckles white as I yank her back toward me, her spine arching in a way that makes my dick leak again.

With a grunt, I gaze down, positioning myself behind her, one hand pressed on the top of her ass while the other grabs my thick cock. I flick the tip over her red raw pussy, collecting some of my cum that's leaking out of her in a white glistening string. Her legs shudder as I set it on her asshole, then I start pressing forward. She whimpers, the pain clear and I can feel it.

I growl, pushing down on her back, forcing her to arch more. I continue, ripping into her hot walls inch by inch until my cock is fully swallowed. My eyes close, a slight wave in my posture before I glance down again, staring at her little pink ring gripping me tight at the base.

"Holy shit," I mutter, more to myself than her.

She attempts to breathe through the discomfort, but she doesn't know what's coming. I'm about to ruin this little virgin asshole. By the time I'm finished, I'll easily be able to slip my dick inside it for the rest of my days.

I lean over her body, grabbing my axe on the way. I set the handle across her throat, harshly tilting her head back with both hands on either side until she's looking at me above her. Her eyes are wide, fear now flashing through them and a small sinister, smirk twitches on my lips.

I lean down, my lips ghosting over hers, then I drag my cock back before driving straight back in with a brutal plunge. She screams, eyes squeezing shut and it ticks something in my sadistic mind.

I pull the handle harder, restricting her breathing as I start to fuck her hard, banging myself deep inside. Her hands claw at the headboard, strangled screams repeatedly cut off by my axe and I snarl, becoming rougher, the sensation of ploughing into her ass everything I ever wanted.

“Let me taste your screams, kitten. I want to feast on your fear.” I bite out, becoming more vicious.

My hips crash against her ass with a brutal rhythm, the sharp sound of flesh meeting flesh echoing through the room, a raw symphony of possession. I watch her carefully, studying every shift of her body, every flicker of resistance or surrender as her face darkens to a deep, bruised purple. Her eyes meet mine, wide and pleading, as though begging for something I won’t give—or perhaps something only I can.

When her lips part, a broken gasp slipping free in her search for air, I lean in. I let the saliva gather on my tongue before releasing it, a glistening thread that lands squarely in her open mouth. The moment it touches her, my chest tightens with savage satisfaction.

I’ve marked her now. Claimed her. Reduced her to nothing and everything all at once. She’s fucking mine, utterly and irreversibly—*and she knows it.*

“This is what you wanted, my beautiful, broken girl. Now you see me—every sadistic, ruthless part of me.” My voice is low and unsteady with the pleasure I can barely contain.

As soon as her eyes roll, almost passing out from the choking and intensity, I loosen my hold on one side of the axe. The moment I do, her lungs seize the chance to draw in a desperate gasp of oxygen and her head slumps forward, almost lifeless.

I shift back, my fingers finding the small of her waist, digging deep into the bloodied flesh. The rawness of it fuels me, sends me spiraling into something feral. My hold strengthens, holding her to me as I pick up the pace, driving her asshole down onto my cock with unrelenting force. Her broken gasps and stifled cries bleed into the air and I own it. I consume it. I lose myself in it.

The tension coils tighter, and tighter, until it finally snaps. My release tears through me violently, leaving nothing but a guttural growl that rips from my chest as I bury myself deep inside her one last time.

As I spill my jizz inside her, my body trembles with the force of it, my head dropping forward to rest against the damp heat of her back. Her asshole pulses around my cock, a relentless thrum that pulls me deeper into overstimulation.

A growl rumbles low in my chest as I sink my teeth into her skin, marking her, grounding myself in the undeniable connection between us. She's trembling, undone beneath me, and yet I can't bring myself to stop. The heat of her body, the way she quakes under my weight—it keeps dragging me back, binding us together in a way neither of us can escape.

"You're everything I knew you'd be. Kitten," I confess, my voice trembling with a mix of devotion and madness. "A perfect ruin. A beautiful obsession I want to drown in until there's nothing fucking left of me."

…

After nearly fucking the life out of Raven, she's curled up naked between my legs, her skin glowing with a sheen of water after washing herself. My back presses against the headboard as her head rests lazily on my chest, her crimson hair damp and sticking to my skin.

The med kit beside me holds tools to patch up the marks she created by jumping through that damn window. I work in silence, wrapping a bandage around her forearm before my gaze flicks to the window, noticing the light outside is dying, sinking into the kind of darkness I thrive in.

"We're leaving. Get your shit," I mutter, my tone sharp, already attempting to move.

She stirs, lifting her head to meet my eyes, her exhaustion painted across her face. "What?" The single word hangs in the between us, heavy with confusion.

"We're not staying here," I say, my voice rough. "I'm taking you somewhere else."

I push myself off the bed, and her wide, concerned eyes follow me.

"But where?" she presses.

I shrug, snatching my black hoodie off the bed. “A fucking motel or something.”

As I pull the hoodie over my head and tug it into place, she keeps questioning, louder now, tinged with panic. “But there’s no motels around here. I looked before I travelled. How do you even plan to get us there? Do you suddenly know how to drive, Ty?”

Her words strike a nerve, and I scoff, glancing down as I thread my belt through my black jeans. “No,” I say, my voice low and edged with mockery, “but you fucking do, my beautiful girl.”

I lift my eyes to hers, watching as the realization hits her. Her disbelief is almost sweet—those wide blue eyes, those freckles on her nose that almost disappear as it scrunches when she gives a subtle shake of her head. It’s like she still thinks there’s a way out of this.

“I can’t drive you,” she protests as her hands slam down on the sheets. “I’ll be an accomplice… I’ll—”

“Hate to break it to you, baby,” I growl, cutting her off sharply, “but you were the moment you stepped into my fucking life. Now, get your ass up before I shove my cock back in there again.”

The room goes still, her eyes searching mine for something—mercy, maybe. But I don’t have any left to fucking give. She doesn’t get it yet—doesn’t understand that she’s fucking mine now. She belongs to me in every distorted, lifelong way. She needs to learn, and fast.

We can’t stay in this dump ass of a town. This place reeks of death—my deaths, my kills. I’ve spilled too much blood here, left my scent clinging to every fucking corner like a curse. The clock’s ticking, and I need to move on, one body closer to finding hers—my sister’s.

When Raven stays silent, still warring with whatever part of her thinks she has a choice, my patience frays. I rake my fingers through my black hair, letting it fall forward to shadow my eyes before yanking the hood over my head. I watch her carefully, taking in the subtle rebellion in her gaze, the way her hands fidget.

“Do I have to count and treat you like a fucking child?

Each word lands like a loaded threat, and I feel the air shift between us. It’s not a question—it’s a fucking warning.

Her eyes narrow, a flicker of fight still burning there, but it fades as quickly as it came. She lets out a defeated sigh, her shoulders sagging, and scoots off the bed. I watch her, my eyes dragging over every inch of her battered, naked body.

When she tries to move past me, my arm snakes around her waist, pulling her back into me with a force that makes her gasp, her body fitting against mine as if it belongs there—because it does.

She tilts her head back, her ocean orbs meeting mine and I glance at her parted lips and flushed cheeks before I dipping down, pressing my mouth to hers.

The kiss starts soft, but the moment her lips part, I dominate her. My tongue slides inside and I sweep it over hers, relishing the way she moans and how her body shudders in my arms, every barrier unravelling piece by piece.

When I finally pull away, I hold eye contact as I murmur, “Be a good girl for me, Raven, won’t you?”

She searches my eyes for a moment, as if trying to read something—anything—before she finally nods. But I don’t believe it. Not yet. I know better. There’s still work to be done.

I release her, though, because I don’t have time to fuck around. We need to move. I watch impatiently as she slips into black sweatpants with a matching oversized hoodie.

When she’s done packing her shit, I step forward, closing the distance between us until she’s standing in front of me. I don’t say a word as I reach around, my fingers grazing the soft fabric of her hoodie before I tug it gently over her head. Her red hair spills down her front, soft and glossy in waves, and I can’t help but smirk. It’s almost to perfect, this hoodie. It’s like a reflection of mine.

“Once I’m finished, my beautiful girl, you’ll be skipping merrily alongside me, drenched in some fuckers blood with your own axe swinging down beside you.”

She rolls her eyes, fighting back a devilish smile, the hint of amusement obvious, but before she can move past me, I grab her wrist in a flash, the

cold bite of the handcuff slapping over it. Her wide eyes snap up to mine as I lock the other cuff around my wrist, hiding the metal beneath our sleeves.

“Ty...” Her voice is soft, like she’s trying to find a part of me that isn’t already long gone.

“You can flutter those pretty eyelashes at me all you want, freckles. But I know your fucking game before you even play it. You think I left that bedroom door unlocked by accident this morning?”

Her mouth drops open, but nothing comes out and I smirk before leaning down and throwing my backpack over my shoulder.

“Midnight?” I call and she perks up, leaving the blanket she was curled up in on with floor. She walks toward us, taking a big stretch and I notice Raven eying me suspiciously.

“How the hell do you do that?”

“Do what?”

“Call her and she comes to you as if she’s a dog rather than a cat?”

My brow raises, and I tilt my head to the side. “I guess kittens are just fucking drawn to me.”

“Or kidnapped by you.” She retorts and I try not to smile as I face aside.

From the corner of my eye, I notice her stepping toward me, and I stand tall as she stops close, her tits brushing against my abs. Her gaze glides up my body, slow and deliberately until her eyes settle on mine. Her fingers curl around the strings of my hoodie before she yanks me down to her lips.

“Careful, psycho boy—you’re starting to look dangerously close to happy,” she murmurs, and my jaw flexes.

She reaches down, her palm gliding over the bulge of my cock in my jeans before she squeezes just enough to pull a warning growl from me. “Is that all it took? For you to drain your big dick inside me?”

My eyes darken, holding onto everything I have not to pounce like she’s daring me too. “I may hate you for ruining my life, Ty, but I won’t lie, I’ve never been fucked so good.”

My hand snaps up and around her throat, catching her off guard.

“Careful, beautiful girl—you’re starting to look dangerously close to brave,” I snarl against her lips, my teeth exposed.

Her eyes dance with laughter, then I release her with a small shove. It’s strange—almost fucking irritating. Instead of cowering in the corner like she should, trembling at the sight of the emotionless monster I have exposed myself to be, time and time again, she’s becoming braver. Wrapping me around her little finger, tighter and tighter.

Her boldness isn’t born of innocence or ignorance; no, she’s seen the darkness, the burden of what the fuck I am. But she stands taller, her eyes sharp, as if challenging me to continue trying to break her and show her more of what I can do.

I draw my eyes away from hers and lean down, scooping Midnight up before handing her to Raven. As she takes her, I lift the suitcase, and we leave this mansion behind.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Raven

As we step out of the rotting, ghostly mansion, the night wraps around us like a shroud. The full moon hangs high above, radiating its cold, silver glow over the overgrown path ahead. Ty's fingers are locked around mine in a hold that's almost bruising, dragging me behind him without a word.

"Whose mansion was that, Ty?" I ask, my voice hesitant but edged with curiosity. "Do you know who lived there?"

He doesn't stop, doesn't even look back, but his reply is sharp, laced with a hint of disgust. "My grandparents."

My brows shoot up in surprise, his confession catching me off guard. "You're from this small town?"

He finally glances at me, his black ski mask now pulled up over his nose, revealing only a glint of his brown eyes in the moonlight.

"Not really," he mutters, his tone flat but heavy. "My parents grew up here. Did a lot of… business in this shitpit." The word rolls off his tongue like venom before he pauses for a second, "They lived in another small city not far from here."

I try to think back on the details from his file, but now, when I reach back for them, they slip through my fingers like smoke. It feels like years have passed since I read it, though I know it hasn't been long. It's only been days. Time feels warped around him, distorted, like he bends it to his will the same way he does everything else.

Maybe, eventually, he'll open up to me. Maybe I'll earn a glimpse inside that labyrinth of a mind and find out the truth behind his actions. I need to know why he's doing all of this. Why he chose me. Why he's killing again. I can't believe he's just some mindless murderer who kills for the rush.

There’s something more behind it, a purpose I can feel in every calculated move he makes, in the unspoken burden that shadows his eyes.

But I know that purpose—whatever it is—won’t make it right. Killing isn’t right. It can’t be justified, not really. Yet, I can’t stop myself from wanting to understand. To hear his reasoning. To unravel the dark strings tying him to this madness.

Psychopaths are intelligent, frighteningly so. And Ty… he isn’t driven by a frenzy. There’s no mania clouding his thoughts. Every step, every act, is deliberate. He knows exactly what he’s doing.

I shouldn’t care about the answers. They won’t redeem him, won’t undo the horrors he’s unleashed, but for some stupid, desperate reason, I need to hear them anyway. I need to understand the why, as if that information could validate something—anything—about this twisted connection between us and I hate myself for wanting it.

As he drags me through the woods, Midnight claws at the front of my hoodie, trying to anchor herself as I stumble to match his long strides. My breath comes out uneven, but not just from his pace, but from the filth swirling in my mind.

I can’t stop thinking about the way he fucked me. I can still feel him between my thighs. How his big body felt against mine, like he was claiming me in ways I didn’t know were possible.

My mind is a confused wreck over him, torn between disgust and a pull so strong it’s like I can’t say no—even when I want to, I still find myself wanting to spread my legs for him.

The way he degraded me, his words vicious and disgusting, yet they ignited something dark inside. And then the look on his face—the sheer pleasure in his eyes as he first entered me—I’m sure that altered my fucking brain chemistry. Or maybe it built something. I can’t even tell anymore.

It all felt so riskily right, like we fitted, like I was born to be tangled in his darkness, even as if know, deep down, I should be running as far away from him as I can.

I’m fucked.

There’s no other word for it. Something is seriously wrong with me, and the worst part is—I’m not sure I even want to fix it anymore. I don’t even

know if I can.

…

As we break through the graveyard's stifling silence, I see my car waiting where I left it, parked outside the house I'd been staying in. Leaves cling to its surface, and the sight feels oddly distant, like it belongs to someone else. Ty doesn't reduce his pace while he pulls me along.

"Is there anything in the house that you left behind? Because you won't be coming back here again," he murmurs as he faces me, his voice low, almost intimate, his dark eyes searching mine.

I swallow hard, glancing back at the house with a small headshake. "I think you got everything," I reply, my voice tight.

With that, he unlocks the handcuff from his wrist and slips his warm hand into mine before leading me to the driver's side of the car.

"Where's the keys?" he asks, his tone steady but demanding. I lean down, fumbling with the side pocket of my suitcase until my fingers close around the cold metal.

But before I can straighten, a voice cuts through the stillness like a knife.

"Raven?"

My body freezes mid-rise.

Fuck. It's Jess.

I reluctantly lift my head, my stomach twisting as I see her striding toward us. Ty's response is possessive as yanks me behind him, shielding me with his large frame, and I peek out from around his arm, my brows pinching in confusion as she stops, staring directly at me.

"Where have you been? You never came back after running into that cemetery," she says, her gaze darting suspiciously between us.

My heart pounds, scrambling for an excuse, then the words tumble out before I can even think.

"Oh, I did come back, but my kitten took me on quite the adventure…"

Her eyes narrow as she crosses her arms. "So where have you been? I've been knocking for the past three days."

Ty steps forward, his presence looming as his voice drops into a dangerous growl. “Is it really any of your business? Why the fuck are you hounding her?”

I flinch at the poison in his tone, glancing up at him with wide eyes. His dark eyes lock on hers with an intensity that sends a chill down my spine, but she doesn’t back down, though. Instead, she searches his half-covered face, her own expression hardening as if she senses something is amiss.

“You said you didn’t have a boyfriend, Raven,” she says, her gaze moving to me.

I panic, the lie spilling out before I can stop it. “Oh, he’s not my… boyfriend. He’s my brother.”

The second the words leave my mouth, Ty’s hand tightens around mine in a punishing squeeze, sharp enough to make me bite back a wince.

The woman hesitates, her suspicion softening into confusion as her eyes flick to the suitcase by our feet. “You’re still leaving?” she asks quietly, her voice tinged with uncertainty.

I can feel Ty’s tension in front of me, crackling with restrained violence. This moment is a tightrope, and I have no idea which way it’s going to break.

“Yes I am, I’m going to stay with him,” I respond, breaking eye contact as I lower them.

“That’s a shame, but I wish you well.”

I lift my head, forcing a small, strained smile as Jess hesitates for a moment before turning back toward the house next door. But just as she reaches the door, she pauses, casting one last stern look over her shoulder. The intensity in her gaze makes my skin itch, but I hold steady until she disappears inside.

Only then do I exhale, the sound coming out in a rush I hadn’t realized I’d been holding.

Ty doesn’t say a word, just tugs me forward with an unrelenting pull, yanking open the back door of the car. He hurls the suitcase inside before slamming it shut, the sound ringing out in the night air.

As I settle into the driver's seat, he leans over me, his presence suffocating, and with a swift click, he locks the handcuff onto the steering wheel. My frustration flares, and I roll my eyes with an annoyed huff.

Ty's head tilts slightly as amusement flickers in his dark, calculating eyes, then his gaze drops to my lips, lingering there, and the tension between us sparks. But instead of closing the space between us, he dips back out of the car. Midnight lets out a soft mewl as he plucks her from my arms, cradling her gently against his chest.

He closes the door before sliding into the passenger seat beside me, his fingers stroking Midnight's fur as she nuzzles into him. She presses her nose to his chin, and to my surprise, he lets out a low chuckle as she kisses him with a soft rub.

"Let's get out of here," Ty says, his tone oddly calm, his fingers scratching under Midnight's chin like this entire scenario is natural.

For a second, my stomach flutters as I watch his tenderness toward Midnight and my guard falters, my eyes softening, but I catch myself quickly. Shaking my head to dismiss the haze of the twisted lust, I turn the key in the ignition and press my foot down on the gas, leaving the ghostly town behind.

…

As we drive toward the motel, the hum of the car feels deafening against my thoughts. Ty gives me directions in that clipped tone of his, but my mind is a tangled mess, circling around his diagnosis.

"Ty," I start hesitantly, stealing a glance at him before focusing on the road again. "You know how you said you lied your way through Sacred Heights?"

He doesn't respond right away, his gaze fixed out the passenger-side window, but I can feel him tense slightly, debating whether to engage.

"What does that mean? And what does it mean for your diagnosis?"

Out of the corner of my eye, I catch him sinking deeper into his seat, his jaw tightening as he thinks about responding.

"I'm still a fucking psychopath, Kitten. That's what it means."

My grip on the steering wheel increases and I glance at him again, his profile shadowed, before shifting my gaze back to the dark road ahead.

“But how can you be so sure?” I ask, a flicker of hope edging my tone, though I don’t know what I’m hoping for.

He lets out a sharp scoff, shaking his head as if I’ve asked the stupidest question in the world. “Kitten…” he warns, deep and dangerous, but I ignore it.

“I’m serious, Ty,” I insist. “How the fuck do you know you’re a psychopath?”

He rolls his eyes, his head falling back against the seat as if the conversation itself exhausts him. “Have you ever actually learned about a psychopath before, Raven?”

“Yes,” I snap. “Of course I did some research before I got into all this.”

“Then how the fuck can you not see it?”

I clench my jaw, my chin lifting defiantly as I keep my eyes on the road. I can feel his gaze boring into the side of my face, waiting for me to break under it.

“You’ll learn soon enough, my beautiful girl,” he murmurs, his tone softening into something colder. “Right now, you’re wasting your time. You’re digging for some kind of good in a man who’s fucking hollow and dead on the inside. As you once said… Remember?”

His words hit like a punch to the chest, and I swallow hard, my throat tightening. Maybe he’s right. Maybe I am searching for something that doesn’t exist—a spark of humanity, because deep down, I can’t shake off the feeling that things aren’t as they seem.

Ty’s exactly what he’s shown me since the first day we met. A void wrapped in charm, a monster who doesn’t need to hide because he flourishes in the darkness.

“You saved me,” I murmur, jolting his memory of the two men he killed to protect me in some messed-up way.

“I saved you because I’m fucking obsessed with you,” he growls. “I took you because my mind couldn’t function when I knew you were out there and not beside me, where you belong as mine. Like a poison in my veins, a

sick fucking craving I can’t shake. That, Kitten, is not out of any form of love; it’s out of pure selfish greed because I want you. I could never feel those fluffy emotions. I’m not fucking capable.”

The thought gnaws at me, strange and uncomfortable. A flicker of sadness blooms in my chest, soft and insistent, something I can’t shake. No one should live a life without ever feeling any form of love. Not even someone like him. The idea of him—cold, detached, a void where warmth should be—bothers me in a way I can’t explain.

He’s a killer. A psychopath, I remind myself. A man incapable of love, but even knowing that, my heart clenches with an emotion I don’t want to feel. A strange kind of pity, as if I’m mourning something that was never even there.

“So, why did you lie your way through Sacred Heights?” I ask, shifting in my seat.

He shrugs with carelessness. “To lessen the blow and the time. I knew if I told them everything they wanted to hear, I’d get out quicker and I fucking did.”

My gut churns with unease, making me wonder how many others have done the same. I think of Billy and how close he was to release despite being a ticking time bomb.

“Those doctors think they have it all figured out,” Ty says with a soft chuckle, shaking his head. “But the psychopaths in there are running fucking rings around them. And the motherfuckers are just letting them out, sending them right back into society to pick up where they left off—murdering, raping and ruining lives.”

My stomach churns. “So, you knew others who were doing the same?”

“Yeah,” he answers. “It’s easy to spot when you know what you’re looking for.”

“And you think they should’ve gotten out? Like you?” I press, carefully.

For the first time, he hesitates, and I know something I said has unsettled him, his lips pressing into a thin line. “No.”

I glance at him and his dark eyes meet mine as he continues, each word razor-sharp. “Most of them didn’t deserve to get out. Some of them

should’ve been hung, drawn and quartered as soon as they were fucking caught—for what they did to land there in the first place.”

I study him, trying to piece together the layers of contradiction in front of me. He’s capable of seeing the worst in others but blind to it in himself.

“So why didn’t you tell someone?”

“Because I had my own fucking plan.” His voice drops lower, colder. “Didn’t anyone ever tell you psychopaths only care about themselves, Kitten?”

His words prick at me, pushing me into defensiveness. “So, you don’t care about me?” I challenge, my chin lifting. “If I died tomorrow, how would you feel?”

His eyes narrow before a low, feral growl escapes his throat. “Murderous.” The word slashes between us like a promise. “But after I’ve burned the world down for taking you from me, I’d join your ass in hell.”

“Hell?” I echo while glancing at him.

“Yeah, my beautiful girl,” he responds, his lips curling into a wicked smirk, his dimples showing. “You know you sinned the moment you let the fucking devil brutally screw all three of your holes, right? Those delicious screams definitely earned you a place in hell.”

Heat floods through me, my thighs clenching involuntarily and I glance out the window beside me to distract myself from the feeling, but his words wrap around me like a fucking noose.

…

When we finally reach a deserted motel on the side of a lonely highway, the place looks as if it’s barely used. Old. Rough. Its cracked neon sign flickers, the word “Vacancy” buzzing like a dying fly. Ty’s iron grasp on my wrist, still cuffed to his, drags me toward the reception as I cradle Midnight against my chest.

“Keep your pretty head low, Kitten,” he murmurs firmly.

I inhale deeply, trying to steady myself, and drop my head as instructed. The sharp squeak of the door handle echoes in the near-silence when he pulls it open.

Inside, the reception area is as miserable as the outside—dim lighting, peeling wallpaper, and the faint stench of mold. At the desk, Ty leans forward and smacks the tiny bell with impatience. Moments later, an older woman shuffles out from the back, her movements sluggish. She doesn't bother looking at us, her gaze fixed on some invisible point in the distance.

"Name?" she rasps, her voice like sandpaper.

"We don't have a name. We just need a room," Ty responds, his tone rude, already annoyed with the interaction.

Her wrinkled face twists slightly, but she doesn't lift her eyes. "I need a name," she insists.

Ty sighs sharply, then slaps a thick wad of cash onto the counter and the sudden smack of money against wood makes me flinch.

"We'll be here for the week," he says, "No fucking name."

The woman finally moves, her head lifting slightly, her expression sharp and calculating as she eyes the money. Slowly, she drags the stack toward herself with greedy fingers, licking them before she starts counting the bills one by one.

When she's finished, she slides her gaze up to me, and her eyes immediately narrow at the sight of Midnight nestled in my arms.

"No pets."

My stomach drops, and I hold Midnight closer, ready to protest, but Ty's growl cuts through the tension like a blade. Without a word, he slams another stack of cash onto the counter, the impact making the woman recoil.

I glance at him in disbelief, wondering where the hell all this money is coming from, but Ty's harsh glare keeps me silent.

The woman stares him down for a long moment, her jaw tight as if weighing the situation. Finally, with a huff of defeat, she snatches the second stack of money and begins counting again.

When she's done, she slams a key down onto the counter, its metal jangling loudly in the quiet room.

"Room 106," she spits out.

Ty snatches the key without a word and yanks me toward the door, Midnight still snug in my arms. Outside, the night is cold.

“Welcome home, my little Kitten’s,” Ty mutters, his voice laced with dark amusement as he leads me to our temporary sanctuary.

…

When we step into the motel room, I take a quick glance around. It’s better than the other two houses I’ve stayed in recently. Ty shuts the door behind us with a soft click, locking it without hesitation and I lower Midnight to the floor, watching her cautiously sniff around the unfamiliar space. I take a few steps forward, still feeling the handcuff on my wrist linked to his, restricting me.

“Where did you get all of that money, Ty?” I ask, knowing that came on a bit strong. But Ty would have lost everything the moment he killed his parents. That’s just the way the law works.

He clicks his tongue twice and shakes his head slightly, his hand setting my suitcase down.

“We’re not married yet, freckles,” he says. “You don’t need to know my finances.”

I roll my eyes, a smile pulling at the corners of my mouth at his ridiculousness.

“Married? Who said I’m marrying you?” I ask, arching a brow, my tone playful. “What a strange and bold way to propose.”

He doesn’t answer, just raises an emotionless brow at me, his dark gaze unwavering. I break the eye contact first, turning away to look around again, but I can feel the weight of his eyes on me, following my every move.

“Hmm... Where are you sleeping?” I tease again. “I guess the floor’s fine.”

Without warning, he yanks me forward by the handcuffs, pulling me into his hard chest. I gasp, the sudden movement catching me off guard, before he effortlessly lifts me, clutching the back of my thighs. A startled squeak escapes me as he strides toward the bed, throwing me down onto the mattress.

He follows, coming down on top of me, positioning himself between my legs, his body settling against me while he’s propped up on one elbow.

I smirk, staring up into his brown eyes, the intensity making my stomach flutter. My hand moves to his face, my fingers gently pushing his hood down. I grab his ski mask and yank it off, revealing his tousled black hair, falling messily over his eyes. I run my fingers through the back of it, the silky strands slipping between them as I pull him closer.

“Okay... You can stay in here with me,” I murmur, my gaze dropping to his lips, feeling the electric charge between us.

He smirks—just a hint of that devilish grin, the one that makes me weak.

“You didn’t think you actually had a choice, did you?” He asks darkly.

I stay silent, our eyes locked and I sense in that moment, something shifts between us, something subtle, yet unmistakable. I can’t put my finger on it, but I feel it, deep inside me, a warmth that spreads like a slow burn, twisting and squeezing in my chest.

My hand moves to the side of his neck, fingers grazing the soft skin there. His gaze drops for a moment, as if he can sense it too, and I watch him—his body stiffening in the smallest of ways. I catch it though, the tension in his muscles, the tightening in his jaw.

He’s not used to this. He’s not used to affection. To someone being close, vulnerable, human with him.

When his eyes lift to mine again, I feel mine soften but he instantly breaks eye contact, like he’s trying to push me away, dismiss me without a second thought. The space between us feels colder, more distant as he leans over, unlocking the cuff from my wrist. The weight of his body withdraws from mine, and I feel the heat leave me.

I stare at the ceiling, my thoughts swirling, a few seconds stretching too long and out of the corner of my eye, I see him heading toward the bathroom door, moving like he’s already shutting me out.

“Tell me, Ty,” I say, my voice quieter than I intended but still firm.

He stops instantly, but remains silent, his back still to me. I sit up quickly, the movement almost desperate, and scoot off the bed. My feet hit the floor with a soft thud as I stand, my body trembling with the weight of what I’m about to say.

“Tell me everything. I need to understand.” The words come out more like a plea, but I stand taller. “There’s more to you. I can feel it.”

He side-eyes me briefly, a flash of something unreadable before he looks away again, closing off. His silence is like a wall and my chest knots with frustration. I feel the sting of tears behind my eyes, but I force them back.

“You say you want me,” I continue, my voice cracking. “You kill people, but you can’t even find the fucking balls to tell me why.” The words spill out before I can stop them, raw and real, full of the anger and hurt.

He lifts his chin, taking a deep inhale. I blink, and before I can stop them, the tears I’ve been holding back spill down my cheeks.

“Do you not know how hard this is for me?” I say, but he doesn’t move, doesn’t say a word, so I continue. “I couldn’t be there for my dad. I couldn’t help him in even the smallest way, but if I would’ve known...”

My chest constricts as I inhale shakily, trying to keep the hurt from consuming me, but it wraps around me, a suffocating weight that causes my body to tremble.

“And now I have to sit here, working out where your mind is. Why you do the things you do. Why the fuck we’re here. Whats going to happen next. What’s going to happen to YOU next.” My voice breaks, the vulnerability slipping through my defences before I can stop it. “It’s killing me, Ty. Please.”

I take a step forward, the words tumbling out faster now, desperate, as though I’m afraid if I don’t say them, I’ll lose this connection entirely. “I fucking beg you. Let me in. I can’t work you out.”

He doesn’t react immediately, and then, finally, his words cut through the silence. “Why do you want to, Kitten?” His tone is cold, devoid of any emotion.

I freeze. It’s a valid question, and I don’t have a clear answer. Is it just curiosity that pulls me toward him, or is it something deeper? A strange tug that grows stronger every time we’re near each other. Every time we connect in the most messed up ways.

Am I sinking into his hold, giving pieces of myself to someone who thrives on control, on darkness?

Or am I falling for him, in some fucked way, afraid that I could lose him like I did my dad?

Or am I seeing something that isn't even visible. Something that makes me believe there's more to him than he's ever shown me. Something good.

When he turns to face me, I choke on air. His gaze locks onto mine, assessing me, studying the tear-streaked mess of my face. I want to look away, but something keeps me rooted and I stand firm.

His eyes narrow slightly, his jaw tensing and for a split second, I wonder if he's about to push me away again, to break whatever fragile bond we have.

"Tonight," he says, his tone final. My brows crease in confusion, but before I can ask, he continues. "I'll show you everything you need to see tonight. Wrap up warm."

Show me? I ask myself, but before I can challenge his words, he turns and enters the bathroom, locking it behind him.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Ty

I sit in the passenger seat beside Kitten, watching the way her fingers tighten on the steering wheel, the grip white-knuckled, as if trying to keep a hold of herself. I know she's nervous, I can feel the fucking tension in her body from here. Every time she shifts in her seat, it's like she's trying to run from something, but she can't. Not from me. Not from this.

I wasn't going to bring her here, at least not yet, but there's only so much you can hide when the truth is gnawing at your insides like a fucking disease. If she's ever going to understand, it'll be now.

I thought I'd have to drag her into my hell, break her down bit by bit until she had no choice but to see me for what I am. I thought she'd hate me—fear me. But tonight, when she asked me to tell her, when she begged me to explain... something in me snapped.

She wants to understand. She cares about me.

I may not be capable of much in the feelings department, but I fucking felt that.

Nobody has ever given a shit about me. Not in the way she begged in that moment. No one's ever seen me—really seen me. When I was a kid, I was alone. When I lost my sister, I was alone. When I killed my parents, I was alone. When I was in Sacred Heights, I was alone. No one fucking cared or saw me. But Raven... Raven sees me, or at least, she wants to see me, even if she's terrified of what she might find.

And now I'm taking her to one part of the puzzle. The truth, the reason I'm broken beyond saving. The truth I've lived with for over twenty years. She's so fucking close to understanding, I can taste it. And yet, I'm fucking terrified. Terrified that when she sees the truth—the ugly, ugly truth—she'll run.

But I won’t let her. I can’t. Even if it tears me apart, even if she’s disgusted by me. I can’t let her go.

She doesn’t know how shattered I really am. How much of me is nothing but pieces of a kid who never had a fucking chance. *The broken little boy who killed to escape his cage*. I don’t even know where the line between who I am now and who I was starts and ends.

I’m sat here fighting the urge to give in to the feeling in my chest—the one that says just let her in. Don’t do it this way.

But what happened to me and my sister is nothing I could ever just spill from my lips. I wouldn’t even know where to fucking start. The words don’t exist for the kind of horror we lived through, the kind of evil that shaped me. And even if I could string them together, it wouldn’t be enough—not for her, not for anyone.

I believe you have to see it, you have to feel it, deep in your fucking bones, until it digs in and tears at every thread of your humanity. Only then can you even begin to understand. It’ll change everything you think you know about this cruel, rotting world forever.

“Pull up here, Kitten. Cut the engine,” I order calmly, my eyes scanning the dark woodland surrounding us.

She does as I say, and the world falls silent, the hum of the engine disappearing into nothingness. The moonlight filters through the dense tree’s above, casting a fractured light over her face. I glance at her; her glassy eyes dart everywhere, searching for answers she won’t find. Not yet.

Leaning over, I reach up, grabbing her hood and slipping it over her head, the shadow swallowing her expression. Her wide eyes flick to mine, uncertainty swimming in their depths.

“You ready?” I ask quietly.

She gulps hard, hesitation sweeping across her face, but then she nods.

I don’t give her time to second-guess. I open my door, stepping out into the cool night air. It’s sharp, biting, the kind of chill that freezes your veins. After shutting my door as quietly as I can, I round the car to her side and unclasp her handcuff.

The metal drops away from her wrist with a faint clink, and I notice the way she instinctively rubs her skin. She looks up at me, confusion etched

into her features, probably wondering why I’m not keeping her locked to me.

Sliding my hand into hers, I feel her fingers tremble slightly before they tighten around mine. She steps out, and I take a moment to adjust my ski mask over my face, tugging my hood further down.

“Listen to me very carefully, beautiful girl,” I murmur as my eyes lock on hers. “Not a sound. No matter what you see.”

I see it, the reluctance contorting in her features, but after a moment she gives another small, reluctant nod. I take a deep inhale, gesturing toward the woods with a tilt of my head.

Keeping her hand locked tightly in mine, I lead her into the darkness. The woods seem to grow colder with every step, the towering trees arching over us and the bark turns pale, almost ghostly.

Then I see it. The faint glow of light breaking through the trees ahead. My hold on her hand squeezes, and I feel her respond, her fingers clutching mine harder, instinctively.

I stop us a good distance away, pulling her behind a wide, ancient trunk. Her back presses against me, my arm wrapping securely over her waist to keep her steady and close to me. We peek out together, the cold wood of the tree biting into my cheek as I scan the scene ahead.

The air in the clearing reeks and it jogs memories I’ve tried to suppress. It’s a smell I’ve known before, one that tells me I’m standing in a place where something horrific has happened—and where something worse is about to.

The red glow from the torch's dances on the pointed stone altar in the center, the shadows twisting around it like they’re alive. The altar is old—ancient, maybe—with dark stains marking its surface. *Blood*. I’ve seen enough to know it’s fucking blood. That means I’m late. My jaw clenches as I take everything in, a sick rage brewing in my chest, my palms sweating.

Around the altar, a group of figures stand in a wide circle, all wearing black robes that blend with the darkness of the trees. Their faces are hidden beneath their hoods as always and their movements synchronize, the performance done thousands of times before this. One of them steps forward, raising a rod with a carved, twisted end that glints in the firelight.

It catches my attention immediately. Symbols I don't understand, yet instinctively hate, snake up the length of it.

Low chanting fills the air, a gruff, unsettling hum that starts to pull at my sanity. It's rhythmic, growing louder with every passing second, until it's all I can fucking hear. I can feel its intent—dark, hungry, cruel. Flash backs dash through my mind and I shut my eyes, attempting to block them out. My own ritual and what happened after. I drop my head, placing my forehead on Kitten's hair, taking a deep inhale, her sweetness flooding my dark senses and temporarily clearing my mind.

I lift my head, and glance down at Raven, her face pale under her hood, but she doesn't make a sound. I see the look in her eyes, wide and shimmering in the torchlight, I see the fear. The confusion.

She doesn't know what this is yet. Not really. But I do.

This isn't just a ritual. This is the lead-up. The preparation. These cunt's are getting ready for someone and they're building into something more than a ritual. Maybe a sacrifice.

"What is this, Ty?" she whispers so I can only hear.

I dip my head, my chin resting on her shoulder and I feel her trembling arms tighten around mine

"This is the world through my eyes," I murmur. "The part of the world no one talks about. The part people pretend doesn't exist."

As if on cue, the first of them emerge from the tree line—children. Their small bodies are dragged into place, lined up against the shadowed woods. I hear Raven's breath hitch in her throat. My stomach twists as I watch their wide, trusting eyes, their faces untouched by anything except innocence. The moment crashes down on me, but I shove my emotions into the dark corners of my mind. This isn't about me. It's about her. It's about showing her—this is who the fuck I am. This is why I did what I did. Why I'll continue doing it until I've gotten what I want.

A tiny figure, barely more than a toddler, is yanked forward by a hooded figure. His cries tear through the woods as he's dragged, his parents trailing just behind him, dressed in their pristine suits. Their faces are cold, emotionless, as if nothing out of place is happening. But the boy, with his chubby hands reaching for them, his voice a desperate whimper, calls out,

“Mommy!” The cry echoes, piercing the night, and Raven wheezes. I feel her body stiffen, and my chest clenches as her sob rises, threatening to break free.

She takes a step forward, her instincts kicking in, her body already wanting to help, to save him. But I can’t let her. I can’t let her interfere with this, not yet. Not until she’s seen the full truth. My hand shoots up, pressing gently but firmly over her mouth, and I pull her back into me, feeling her soft breath against my palm as she struggles to hold it in.

“Shhh…” I hush against her ear. I feel her body trembling in my arms, her tears slipping down my fingers as they fall from her eyes. I can’t even bring myself to look at her—at how broken she’s already becoming, how she’s slipping away from her innocence with every second that passes.

The boy is laid onto the altar, his limbs shaking, but the parents just stand there. Silent. Watching. The hooded figures circle around him, their chants rising like a frustrating wave.

Raven pulls my hand down from her mouth. “Please, Ty,” she whispers, almost pleading. “Tell me what I’m about to see before I see it.”

“It’s a ritual,” I say, trailing off, the reality of it all settling deep in my chest. It’s not just a ritual, though. It’s the beginning of something far worse.

“But his parents… they’re just… letting it happen?” She hisses, the horror and anger creeping into her gaze. “They’re just watching.”

She spins in my arms, her eyes wide, frantic, searching mine for the truth she’s not sure she wants to hear. “Are they going to kill him?”

I glance over at the ritual before my eyes flitting back to hers and I respond. “I don’t know. They’re all different. Some are just rituals. Some are sacrifices. Some are… lessons.”

“Lessons?” She repeats, her brows knitting together in confusion. She’s trying to piece it together, but it’s so much, too much and I can’t bring myself to shield her from the truth any longer.

I swallow hard, keeping my voice as steady as I can. “They’re abused, Kitten,” I whisper. “It could be a beating, or it could be rape.”

Her eyes widen, and I see the tears spill freely from her eyes now, her face twisting in a mixture of horror, confusion, and something like guilt. I

can feel her breaking; her innocent mind cracked by a world she never asked to be part of.

“This is what happens when power and corruption collide, beautiful girl. They don’t just destroy bodies—they destroy souls. Innocent souls.”

She shakes her head frantically, her hands taking my hoodie, pulling me down closer to her. The sound of the little boy’s cries rips through the air, growing louder, more desperate with each passing second. Raven’s body trembles, and I can feel the heat of her tears burning into my skin as she presses her face into mine, pleading with me.

“You have to stop this. Why aren’t you doing anything?”

Her words are like a physical blow. They hit me so hard I feel them deep in my chest, striking at the very core of me. I want to stop this. I want to reach out, to rip this world apart, to take that boy in my arms and run—get him as far away from here as I fucking can. But I know I can’t. I know that if I even tried, it wouldn’t change a damn thing.

I shake my head once and press my forehead against hers, closing my teary eyes, her question burning in ways I can’t even explain.

“I’m one man against a world I can’t destroy on my own, Raven.” I feel my throat tighten as I speak the fact I’ve known for so long. “This isn’t my calling. This kid... he’s not for me to save.”

I want to take it back. I want to take those words and swallow them before they can poison the fucking air between us, but I can’t. It’s the truth. A bitter truth that’s been haunting me for years. I’ve spent so much time trying to figure out how to take down this whole damn system, and it’s always been out of my reach. I’ve had to accept that, painful as it is. I need to stick to my plan and my plan only or I’d be doing this for the rest of my miserable life and the end result will still be this. Nothing will change.

I feel her confusion, her doubt, her frustration—everything that still has hope in her, clashing with the darkness in me.

“What about the police? Anything? Someone has to be able to stop this…”

“This…” I gesture toward the ritual, my whisper thick with everything I’ve seen, everything I’ve been a part of. “This is what untouchable looks like, kitten. No official will touch this. Not even the law.”

Her eyes widening as the realization hits her, like a cold slap to the face. Her whole body stiffens, and for a second, I can feel the raw anger vibrating off her, the urge to do something, anything. She spins around, her hands balling into fists at her sides, and I see the spark in her—she wants to be the hero. She wants to stop it all, to fight the system that keeps children like that little boy at the altar.

Before she can take a single step forward, I move quickly, my arm slipping around her waist, pulling her back against me and place my hand firmly over her mouth, shutting her down before she can do anything stupid.

Without waiting, I lift her effortlessly, feeling the fight in her as she struggles in my arms. I don't pause. I don't stop to explain. I just move.

I keep walking, each step taking us further from the clearing, from the screams and the ritual. The boy's desperate cry fades into the distance, but it feels like a weight in my chest, like a venom seeping into my black soul.

She's still struggling in my arms, but it's more like a defeated twitch now, yet I don't stop until we're deep enough into the woods that we can't hear the screams anymore, and I set her down. She spins to face me, her eyes wide, furious, terrified, and full of something else. Something I can't read but something that cuts through me like a blade.

"You let them…" Her tone cracks as she takes a step forward. "You let them hurt him. You didn't do anything!" Her chest rises and falls as she struggles for breath, the pain on her face so raw that it almost stops me in my tracks.

"Don't, Raven," I warn, my voice a growl and sharp, cutting through the tension. "Don't fucking judge me for something you don't understand."

She steps closer, her face full of anger, her eyes searching mine as if she's looking for a piece of me that's still human. Still salvageable. "How can you stand there and do nothing, Ty?"

I can feel the edge in her tone, the disgust seeping through the cracks, and it fucking hurts more than I can put into words. But I don't show it. I can't. She still isn't understanding why I bought her here. She's thinking about why I didn't act instead of why she's here in the first place. She stares me straight in the eyes, straight into my soul before she scoffs and walks past me.

“I was that little boy once…” The words leave me like a disease that’s festered inside me for far too long. My eyes blur with tears as I stare at some spot on the leafy ground.

She stops dead in her tracks behind me, and I can’t hear her breath anymore, she’s holding it, thinking, calculating. So, I continue, “My fucking parents stood there and watched too.”

I hear her exhale, the sound piercing through silence. She steps closer, the crunch of leaves under her feet mild. When she stops in front of me, I avert my eyes, keeping my face turned away. I can’t meet her gaze—I already know what I’ll see.

Her hand lifts, and when her fingers touch my cheek, my body tenses instinctively. The softness of her touch makes me feel exposed, vulnerable in a way I’ve never allowed myself to be. She presses her palm gently against my face, urging me silently to look at her, to let her in.

Reluctantly, I let my eyes shift to hers. She searches me, trying to find the truth or the lie. When she finds whatever it is she’s looking for, she swallows hard, her throat bobbing, and slams her hand over her mouth. A small, muffled sob escapes, and I feel it slam into my soul.

She shakes her head once, squeezing her eyes shut, then lowers her head.

“I’m sorry…” she whispers after dropping her hand from her mouth.

Her apology confuses me and my brows pinch. She lifts her head, her wet, red, puffy eyes meeting mine.

“Can you take us back to my car? I can’t be here… Not now.”

I give a small nod before reaching out, taking her shaky hand in mine and I take her back to her car.

…

Driving back to the motel, Raven sat completely silent. I expected her to explode with questions, to demand answers I wasn’t ready to give, but instead, she just stared straight ahead. Her eyes were fixed on the road like she was trying to escape into the darkness beyond it. Tears rushed down her cheeks, glinting faintly in the passing streetlights, and every so often, she sniffled softly.

Her reaction wasn’t what I thought it would be, and it threw me. But somehow, it was better. The questions, the accusations, the desperate attempts to “fix” what’s fucking unfixable—none of it came. That endless, pointless noise I’ve heard from every therapist, every well-meaning social worker, every goddamn judge—it wasn’t there. Just silence.

And her silence said more than words ever could. She gets it now, at least a little. She knows there are no answers that can make this better. No way to wrap this up in a neat little bow of closure. There’s no cure for this sick world or me, no fix for the way people tear people apart and spit out the broken pieces.

It’s a bitter truth, and seeing her wrestle with it hurts more than I thought it would. I glance at her out of the corner of my eye. Her face is pale, her lips trembling faintly as she fights to maintain her composure. She looks fragile, like glass ready to shatter.

…

When we step into the motel room, the door barely clicks shut behind us before I yank off my mask and hoodie, tossing them onto the chair without a second thought. I head straight for the bathroom, the walls shrinking with every step. I need air. I need silence. I need her not to see me like this.

Inside, I slam the door shut and lean back against it. My hands tremble as I reach for the shower knob, twisting it all the way to the hottest setting. Steam begins to fill the small space, but it does nothing to burn away the images in my head.

The kid’s face—wide-eyed, desperate, trusting—won’t leave me. His screams echo in my skull, overlapping with screams from a lifetime ago. I press my fists into my eyes, trying to scrub them from my memory, but they’re embedded too deep. And Raven—God, the way she looked at me, begging me to help, like I was anything other than what I am. Like I could’ve saved him.

I let him go. Just like I let her know the truth. I was that kid once. I felt the same helplessness, the same betrayal by the ones who were supposed to protect me. The weight of saying it out loud crushes me now, a sickness rising in my gut, spreading through every part of me. It’s too much. All of it.

I strip down in frantic motions as the water pounds against the shower walls, a dull roar that I hope drowns out the storm inside me. I step under the spray, letting the scalding heat hit my skin, but it doesn't cleanse me. It doesn't wash away the filth or the pain or the goddamn memories.

I press my forehead against the cold tile, clutching the edge of the showerhead so hard it creaks. My tears mix with the water running down my face as I try to swallow the lump in my throat, but it only grows heavier. This is all I've ever known. This pain. This darkness. This endless fucking cycle of cruelty. Even my sweet little sister—her memory, her smile—has been tainted by this fucking cruelty. She was my only light, and they stole her from me. They tore her away like she was nothing.

I punch the wall, the sharp sting in my knuckles grounding me for only a second. My chest heaves as I let out a guttural sound I can't even name—a cry, a scream, maybe both. I dig my nails into my scalp, trying to pull myself back together, but there's nothing left to hold onto.

The water pools around my feet, but I feel like I'm drowning anyway. All I want is to feel clean—to feel something—but I never will. Not with this blood on my hands. Not with this broken, twisted thing I've become.

When my body feels too heavy to carry, I let myself collapse onto the floor, the tiles pressing into my back. My knees draw up, my arms slung over them like dead weight, and I lower my head. My chest feels like it's caving in, shallow and strained as anxiety sinks deeper into me.

Then, through the hiss of the water, I hear it shift—the small change in its rhythm. My muscles tense as I gradually lift my head and blink through my blurred, weeping eyes.

She lowers herself down, her small, naked body pressing between my legs. She curls herself sideways against me, tucking in, like I won't shatter the moment she touches me. Her silent presence, her nearness, breaks something inside me—something that I thought had already been broken beyond repair.

A sob breaks free before I can stop it, real and unfiltered, and I lower my head again. She doesn't recoil, doesn't abandon me. Instead, she wraps her arms around my neck, pulling me closer, holding me. At first, I go stiff, the instinct to push her away rising like an automatic response. I'm not used to

this—this compassion, this… love. Not in any form. I've never been held, never been fucking cuddled, never been wanted like this.

But slowly, like a caged animal inching toward freedom, I let myself lean into her. I press my face into the crook of her neck, letting her scent, her warmth, envelop me. And eventually—finally—I bring my arms up, trembling as they wrap tightly around her small frame, pulling her into me and I hold her like she's the only thing keeping me together to this world.

Then something shifts inside me. The constant darkness that's exhausted me for so long feels… interrupted. Her light—soft, steady and undeniable—pierces through, illuminating even the smallest corner of my abyss. It blinds my gloom, forces it back just enough for me to see her.

She doesn't say a word. She doesn't fucking need to. And she doesn't know how much it means. Her touch, her being here, speaks louder than any words ever could. Her actions say what no one ever said to me before:

You're not alone. I see you, Ty. I'm fucking here.

And I believe her. For the first time, I believe it. Then, strangely, impossibly, it feels like a part of me, a part I thought was dead forever, begins to heal. Just a tiny piece, but it's enough. Enough to cling to. Enough to know that in this moment, in this small space, I might actually be worth saving.

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Raven

Lying in bed, Ty and I face each other in the dim room, naked under the duvet, our hair still damp from the shower. The flickering light from the TV dances across the walls, casting faint shadows over us.

All I can do is stare into his eyes. Those piercing eyes that have terrified me, unsettled me, consumed me. But tonight, something changed. Tonight, I saw him—truly saw him. Not the man who kidnapped me, not the killer, not the psychopath, I've been trying so hard to figure out.

I saw the boy beneath it all, the boy who was destroyed piece by piece until there was nothing left but pain and rage. Something inside me broke when I saw him like that.

I asked him to show me his world, and he did. God, he did. But I never expected this. I should have, though, shouldn't I? The signs were all there—hiding in the edges of his words, the way he looked at me when I pushed too far. The scars that covered his body, the venom in his voice when he spoke of his parents, the anger and desperation when he mentioned his sister. It was all there, waiting for me to see it. But I didn't. I was too scared of him, too caught up in his violence and unpredictability to look beyond the monster I thought he was.

Now, I know. And knowing… it hurts. It's a heartache I wasn't ready for. Ty is broken. He's fractured into so many pieces that I don't know if he'll ever be whole again. The people who were supposed to protect him, love him, cherish him—they were the ones who tore him apart. They turned him into this. Into someone who doesn't know how to love or trust, someone who hides his pain behind walls so high, I'm amazed I even got to see the other side.

I feel sick knowing what he went through. I feel devastated for him, for the boy he was, for the little boy I saw in those woods tonight who might

not make it out alive. It’s the same ache I’d feel for anyone who has endured that kind of suffering, but with Ty, it’s different. It’s personal. Because even though I’m sometimes afraid of him, even though I’ve hated him at times, I care. I care so much it makes me want to fucking scream.

Knowing this about him, about his past, it makes me feel like something inside me has changed forever. Like I’ll never look at him the same way again. How could I? How could anyone?

“Don’t pity me, kitten,” he murmurs. “That’s all I ask.”

“It’s not pity,” I whisper back, my lips twitching into a small, teasing smile. “I still think you’re an unhinged asshole, don’t worry.”

A faint smile cracks his otherwise stony expression, but it doesn’t linger. As quickly as it appears, it vanishes, leaving only the intensity in his gaze. I shift closer, feeling the warmth of his bare skin against mine, the hard muscles of his chest meeting the soft curves of my breasts. His arm snakes around my back, pulling me in, holding me there and our faces are so close that I can feel his breath on my lips.

“What’s your plan, Ty?” I ask softly. “If you’re not killing them, then who are you killing?”

He watches me for a moment, his eyes dark and stormy, then he lets out a slow exhale, his forehead grazing mine as he adjusts his head on the pillow.

“I am killing those people, kitten,” he answers. “But I can’t kill all of them. Even if I want to. I’m just one man with his axe. I have to stick to my plan—focus on the ones who were directly involved with me and my sister.”

His words sink in, and I stare into his eyes, piecing together everything he’s said, everything I’ve seen tonight, and everything I know about him. His earlier words from the woods echo back, and for the first time, they truly click.

As much as it sickens me to admit, he’s right. There are too many of them, too much evil in the world to erase. Even someone like Ty, with his relentless viciousness, can’t take on a system so deeply rooted. If he tried, it would kill him and there would still be no end. But that truth doesn’t make it any easier to swallow.

“What happened to her?” I ask, my voice barely above a whisper.

Ty’s gaze hardens slightly at my question, his jaw tightening.

“They took her,” he begins. “My parents… they gave her to them. Like she was fucking nothing. Just a bargaining chip for their sick obsession with power.”

I feel my throat tighten, but I don’t say anything. I let him talk, sensing he needs to let it out, even if every word feels like a dagger to the heart.

“She was ten. Ten fucking years old, and they handed her over to monsters. I always begged my parents to leave her out of it,” he says with a bitterness that cuts deep. “I told them to do what they wanted to me. Put me through the hell, but never her.”

His eyes lower, shadowed with memories I can’t begin to fathom. “My father would beat and whip me for speaking out, every damn time, but it didn’t stop me from saying it.”

When his gaze rises again, it pins me in place. “She was a rebellious, stubborn little thing—three years younger than me, and I encouraged it. I told her to stay that way. Not to provoke them, but because I knew what they wanted.” His jaw clenches as his teeth grind. “They liked them innocent, quiet, soft. They didn’t want fight. They wanted obedience.”

I don’t speak. I don’t move. I just listen.

“For a while, it felt like my plan was working. They were just happy using me. As much as it was killing me, breaking me, I could take it if it meant keeping her safe. But then, one day, everything changed.

He shifts slightly, staring past me as if the room has disappeared, replaced by something only he can see. “They told us we were going to dinner. Some high-end fucking place in the city. Said we needed to dress our best.” His lips form into a thin line. “And we did. We went for dinner. But after, the limousine stopped outside a mansion…”

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THAT NIGHT…

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TY

On the way home from dinner, the night seemed calm. Dinner was nice, and Penny and me had fun drawing while we waited for our supper to be served. Mom and Dad chatted among themselves, occasionally glancing at us from across the table. I tried to push aside the small unease that crept up my spine now and then.

Now we're in the limousine, heading home. Penny and me are talking at one end, away from our parents. Their eyes are fixed on us, and I start to feel uncomfortable, like something is about to happen. I shift in my seat, pressing myself closer to Penny.

Suddenly, the car comes to an abrupt stop, and my heart stops with it. A sinking feeling settles in my stomach as my eyes dart to the back of the limo where my parents sit. Their faces are grave.

Before I can process it, the door swings open beside Penny. Without warning, a man in a suit and sunglasses lunges inside, grabbing her from her seat and yanking her out of the limo. I grab for her arm, but she slips out of my grip.

"No!" I shout at the top of my lungs.

"Ty! Help me!" she screams, her high-pitched shriek stabbing through me—the kind of sound that will haunt me forever.

I lurch forward, ready to jump out after her, but my father grabs me, slamming me violently back into the seat. My breaths are frantic as I watch her being carried into the mansion, her screams fading until she's out of sight.

My eyes flash to another man in a suit standing nearby. He stares at me, expressionless, but I meet his gaze with raw fury—a silent death threat. Then, the limo door slams shut.

My father shoves me over the seat, tearing at my shirt until it rips from my body. I hear the rattle of his belt being pulled from its loops, and my

mind begins to spiral.

Everything around me blurs—the car, my dad shouting venom at me, the looming violence. All I can think about is my helplessness, the sound of Penny's screams, and the horrors she's about to face.

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PRESENT TIME…

His hand curls into a fist against my back. “I was held back as she screamed for me,” he says, his tone breaking slightly, the memory shredding him. “Begged me to save her. But I couldn’t. And every second that ticked by, I knew what they were about to do to her. I fucking knew.”

A tear slips down my cheek, but I don’t wipe it away. I can’t.

“I never saw her again,” he says finally. “They never spoke about her to me again. It was like she never existed. Like she wasn’t my entire fucking world.”

He takes a pause, his eyes darting around as the memories consume him. “Days turned into weeks, and I accepted it. I accepted that they had done something to her. That she was gone forever.”

When his eyes meet mine again, they’re sharp, filled with a coldness I’ve never seen before. “My mind spiralled after that. And I planned. I killed them. I didn’t hesitate. I didn’t fucking care about the consequences. I was done. They broke me too much.”

The quiet after his confession is deafening, every unspoken word lingering between us until he continues again.

“I spent years in that asylum, kitten. Fifteen years plotting, digging, waiting for the day I could get out and finish what I started. And now I’m doing it. One by one. Every single person who touched her, who profited from her pain—they’re going to pay.”

“Do you think she could still be alive?” I ask quietly.

His eyes flash to mine, and he pauses, thinking carefully before he finally shakes his head once, “No. She’s dead.”

I think about it, about everything he’s told me, and it makes me understand. Although I’ve always thought killing is wrong, is it when it’s against something like this?

“Why didn’t you tell the judge that this was your reason?”

He snickers before lowering his eyes, “Because they don’t want to hear my can of worms being opened, freckles. My family were involved with a system that people like judges and lawyers try to hide and protect. I don’t trust anyone. You can’t trust anyone in this life. So I lied. Said it was a black out and bided my time to get out of there to continue my warpath.”

“And what happens after? When does it end?”

“It ends when I find out what happened to her and where her body is,” my brows pinch and he carries on, “she should be buried in a field of daisies not in some grimy fucking woods somewhere or wherever the fuck they bury people they’ve used and killed.”

I reach up, brushing my fingers gently along his sharp jaw, grounding him in the present. “What if you get caught, Ty? What if…”

He just stares into my eyes, not answering right away, “Then I get caught.” He says with defiance, ready to risk it all.

The realization hits me that he’s ready to get these answers no matter what. He’s too far gone. He’s planned too heavily, he’s so wrapped up in vengeance, and his mind has been so consumed by it. Even after so many years, he’s still living trapped by what his parents did long after them being dead. And that hurts.

I lift my hand to his face, sweeping his jaw with my thumb.

“When do you get your happiness, hm? Don’t you think you’ve had enough misery.”

He stares into my eyes, but doesn’t answer, so I continue, hoping to dig somewhere deep. “Do you know what I think?” I ask and he just looks at me, ready to listen, I guess. “I don’t think you’re the person you think you are. Hell, I’m not even sure if you’re a psychopath anymore.”

His brows pinch enough for me to notice, but then he goes expressionless again.

“I’m not an expert, we’ve established that, and I don’t have the most experience, but one things for certain, Ty. You definitely feel. Much more than you think you do and above all, you fucking care. You care about your sister. You care about me. You’ll risk your life, your freedom, just to keep your special people safe.” I shake my head once, dropping my hand from his face and taking his hand.

“That’s not psychopathy. You’re just a little cracked, but cracks aren’t unfixable. You’re a little deranged, but that’s fine. You’re intelligent like a psychopath though, I’ll give you that, and… I’m kind of starting to like it.”

His eyes ease before a small smirk twitches across his lips.

…

It’s been a few days since that sacrifice—ritual thing and I’m in a haze of emotions. The rain outside pounds relentlessly against the glass, a steady beat that seems to mirror the pulse in my chest.

My arms are wrapped tightly around myself, trying to hold myself together, but it’s useless. The darkness is creeping at the edges of my thoughts, and the memory of that little boy—his cries, his terror—won’t leave me. It churns in my gut, making me feel like I might vomit.

I’m trapped in my own mind, reliving the horrors. I can’t shake it. And just as the tears start to blur my vision, I feel him behind me. Ty’s right there, his shadow cast against the window.

“I can’t stop thinking about that little boy,” I say quietly, like I’m confessing some deep sin. “I just hope he’s okay.”

Ty doesn’t respond immediately, and I don’t turn to face him.

“He’s alive if that what’s you mean.”

I spin around when he says the words and notice he’s dressed, closed off, his ski mask firmly in place.

“How do you know?” I ask, my eyes scanning him.

“Because I found out who the fuck they were, and he went to school today.”

I feel my body melt, like a some of the weight has just been lifted off my body, but then my focus returns to him.

“Where are you going?”

“I’ve got some things to do, beautiful girl. Someone to find,” Ty replies, cool and detached.

The room feels smaller now, my breaths rushing at the thought of him out there, in danger.

“But…”

Ty doesn’t move at first, but his gaze shifts—like he’s measuring me, pulling apart every emotion I try to hide. But I don’t look away.

“Do you think they should die, Raven?” He suddenly questions, shifting the subject to something darker. Something that makes my blood run cold.

I blink blankly, trying to process what he’s saying. The words don’t seem to connect, don’t make sense.

“What?” My bottom lip trembles as I ask.

His eyes never leave mine, his stare unblinking. “His parents. Do you want them dead?”

The question isn’t just about them anymore. It’s about everything—the system, the people who hurt him, the ones who let it happen. I feel like I’m standing on the edge of a cliff, and the only thing I can do is fall.

“Yes,” I whisper and the word escapes before I can stop it. My hand flies to my mouth, like it can somehow pull it back inside, but it’s already out there.

Ty’s growl is dangerous, and it vibrates like a warning. He stands up straighter, his gaze still fixed on mine, but now there’s something sinister in it.

He gives a calm head gesture to behind him. “So, get your coat and fucking keys.”

My eyes widen as he turns his back to me, heading over to the bed to grab his bag and axe. I stand there, stuck on the spot, but eventually, I start to shuffle forward. Curiosity not only getting the better of me, but that little boys cries echoing in my mind.

…

The rain pelts against the windshield as if trying to smash its way in, the rhythmic slapping of the wipers doing little to swipe the water away. The highway stretches ahead as I twist my fingers around the steering wheel.

“Where are we going?” I finally ask, glancing at him, trying to gauge his mood, but he’s blank; just staring at me from behind his hood.

“We’re going to chop them into tiny fucking pieces,” Ty says, his tone casual, like he’s explaining the weather or giving directions.

My stomach twists violently. “What? What do you mean “we”?”

He smirks faintly, his thumb brushing across his bottom lip. His gaze is dark, calculating, and all too knowing. I feel exposed under it. It's like he's staring at the woman of his dreams and as if he wants to devour me whole and spit me out as his dark princess.

"I'm not like you, Ty," I blurt, my words stumbling over each other as my eyes drag down him, unable to stop myself. "I don't have a…" I look forward, refocusing on the road ahead. "Strong stomach."

He hums softly, an almost amused sound. "It's okay, freckles," he murmurs. "You will after tonight."

I swallow hard as I try to force myself to keep calm. But the little boy's screams echo faintly in the back of my mind, and it reminds me why I said I wanted them to die in the first place. While they're alive, the more harm will come to him. He's not safe with them. He never will be.

Ty's chilled presence unnerves me, his absolute lack of hesitation in what's about to happen. My hands tighten on the wheel again as I brace myself. I don't know if I'm fucking ready for this, for what he's about to show me, for what it will mean to see him unleash the beast inside him right in front of me at the highest level.

…

Finally, we pull into a street lined with sprawling mansions, the kind of wealth that doesn't just scream privilege but flaunts it. I cut the engine, and the quiet buzz dies, leaving only the patter of rain. My eyes lock on a lit-up house across from us, its golden glow spilling into the darkness.

"But… is he there?" I whisper. "I don't want him to find his parents like that."

Ty doesn't look at me as he growls. "He's not there. He stays with his aunt and cousins every Wednesday after school."

Before I ask how he knows all this information, the mansion's lights go dark, sinking the house into shadow.

"That's our cue," he says, reaching down to grab his axe resting between his legs. The blade glints faintly as his gloved fingers curl around the handle.

"Wait," I exclaim, my hand shooting out to rest on his bicep and he calmly side-eyes me. "How do you know all this stuff, Ty?"

He lets out a deep sigh, sitting back slightly. “The dad had a logo embroidered on his suit that night. For his company. I searched it up online, found him on social media and because they’re fucking fools, like most of the world, they put their entire lives online. Showing off their perfect, shiny lives and their precious fucking wealth.”

My stomach sinks as his words settle over me. The sharp edge of his intelligence is just as terrifying as his animalistic strength.

“It took me an hour,” he continues. “A simple fucking hour to find out everything I needed—where the little boy goes to school, his parents’ routines, their weekly schedules. They made it that fucking easy for me.”

The sheer ease of how he pieced together these strangers’ lives feels surreal, invasive—and yet, in this case, justified. For the little boy’s sake. That’s why I’m here, I remind myself. Because of him.

“They made it that easy for you,” I murmur.

“People like that always do, my beautiful girl,” he replies, his eyes fixed on the house. “They’re too arrogant to think anyone would dare come for them.”

He glances over at me again, his expression softening, but only slightly. “That’s why I told you, freckles. This world’s not fair. The good don’t always win. But sometimes, the bad get what’s fucking coming to them.”

I nod slowly, our eyes locked in a silent challenge, as tension coils tighter between us. I shift, kneeling on my seat, leaning into him, and bringing my palm to the side of his neck. My fingers trace the back of his hair as I press my lips to his. The kiss starts soft, but the intensity between us erupts like a spark to gasoline.

As our lips part, his tongue slides into my mouth with a possessive hunger. A moan escapes me only to be met by his growl rumbling down my throat. His arm wraps around my back with sudden force, yanking me onto his lap with dominance. My heart races as his lips devour mine, rough and urgent, like he’s pulling the air from my lungs.

His other hand moves swiftly, shoving my thighs apart, then I feel the heat of his touch as his gloved fingers cup my pussy over my sweatpants. A fire ignites deep in my core, spreading fast and I instinctively try to close

my legs against the pleasure, but it's useless as he continues to rub me out, pressing his fingers firmly down on my clit.

My gasp against his lips is shaky as I whisper, "I'm on my…"

"Even better," he snarls as his wild gaze holds mine, but before I can even protest, he swings the car door open.

Cold rain lashes inside, sharp against my hoodie, and before I can even think to scream, his gloved hand clamps firmly over my mouth.

"Time to be a quiet little kitten for me until we're finished. Then, I'm gonna have you screaming for hours."

I stare at him for a long moment, my heart pounding so hard I can feel it in my throat. My body moves before my mind catches up, stepping out of the car into the storm. Rain crashes down, soaking me instantly, the cold seeping through my clothes and chilling me to the bone.

Behind me, Ty follows, then the car door is shut quietly. My hood falls forward as I lower my head, trying to shield myself, then I feel his grip around my hand. His gloved fingers wrap around mine as he drags me into his world—into what's about to happen.

My legs move on autopilot as he leads me across the yard, the rain-soaked grass squelching beneath my boots. His silhouette cuts through the storm ahead of me and his axe glints faintly in his other hand.

We move around the side of the mansion, sticking close to the walls and my pulse thrums in my ears, drowning out everything else as we approach the back patio doors.

Without hesitation, Ty presses a gloved hand against the glass, sliding the door open as if he owns the place. My stomach churns as I step inside after him, water dripping from my clothes onto the polished floor. The stupidity of it strikes me—how someone could leave their home so exposed, so vulnerable.

Do they truly believe they're invincible? The thought makes my gut churn, anger simmering briefly beneath the fear.

Inside, the mansion feels hollow and the rain outside starts to fade into the background, replaced by the soft hum of the house itself. My wet clothes cling to my skin, cold and uncomfortable, but the chill from the

storm is nothing compared to the icy dread that is starting to run through my veins.

I glance at Ty, his face is now covered, his figure moving with lethal grace as he steps deeper into the shadows. There's no hesitation in him, no second-guessing. Every step he takes feels ready, and I know there's no turning back now.

The house is overwhelming in its extravagance—whites, golds, and marble stretch out in every direction, exuding wealth and privilege as if it's all designed to broadcast their untouchable status. My gaze catches on a row of photos lining the wall as we move past them and that little boy's eyes in the pictures seem to follow mine, innocent and wide.

We reach the base of the grand staircase, its polished rail gleaming even in the dim light. Our footsteps barely make a sound as we climb. When we reach the top, something cuts through the stillness—a muffled sound from down the hall. My heart stutters, and Ty's clutch on my hand becomes firmer.

We exchange a glance, but he's already pulling me toward the noise, his movements more slower now. The sound grows louder as we approach, no longer just muffled but unmistakably human—rhythmic, intimate. My stomach churns, bile rising as the hallway opens before us, showing a set of double doors at the far end that are wide open.

As we edge closer, the scene comes into view. The bedroom is massive, with a huge bed dominating the center. She's on top of him, her back to us, her naked body glistening under the soft glow of the massive chandelier. Her body moves up and down as she rides him, his tattooed hands digging into her waist. Her moans echo through the space, each sound sharper than the last.

Revulsion clutches me harder. This fucking house, this picture-perfect couple with their fake images of wealth and happiness—they don't care about the lives they've ruined. About the lives they've destroyed.

I can't look away, even as nausea twists in my gut. They're oblivious to us, lost in their depravity. The little boy's face flashes in my mind again, and the sickening contrast between his pure eyes and this bizarre fucking display makes my blood boil.

Ty’s hand slips from mine, and I feel the cold emptiness left behind as he moves forward, his steps gaining speed and purpose. Both hands grip the handle of his axe tightly, his knuckles white with tension. I hesitate, my feet slowing as I watch him charge into the room ahead, unflinching, unstoppable.

The woman spots him first. Her head jerks around, and her scream pierces the quietness, echoing through the mansion’s grand halls. She scrambles off the bed, naked and desperate, but Ty doesn’t falter. Not for a second.

The man barely has time to react. Ty lifts his axe with a force that shakes the room, a guttural roar tearing from his throat. The blade connects with the man’s chest, sinking deep. The sound it makes is wet, heavy, final. My body jerks involuntarily at the violence of it. Blood sprays in a curve, splattering up the perfect white walls, staining the gold trim, flecking the crystal chandelier overhead.

But Ty doesn’t stop. He lifts the axe again, his muscles straining, his eyes filled with pure rage. The second swing is harder, the crunch of bone and flesh colliding with the blade slashing in my ears. The sound is sickening—a blend of wet thuds and sharp cracks—and it feels like it’s embedding itself into my very bones. Blood pools beneath the bed, spreading across the marble floor in a creeping tide.

As I slowly step into the room, my eyes are drawn first to the mangled corpse on the bed. He’s unrecognizable now, a mass of blood and severed tissue. My gaze shifts to the far corner of the room, where the woman cowers, trembling violently. She’s wrapped in a white sheet, clutching it tightly to her chest as if it’s a shield. Her wide, terrified eyes dart between Ty and me, her lips quivering.

Scared.

She’s fucking *scared.*

My hands clench into fists as rage boils in my veins. Scared? She dares to tremble now, to cower like the fucking victim? My mind flashes to the little boy’s face, his cries echoing in the darkness of my memory. Where was her fear then? When her child, her baby, screamed for help, for mercy? She wasn’t trembling then. She didn’t flinch when it was his innocence being torn apart for their sick, twisted world.

With Ty so lost in his frenzy, hacking at that man like a wild animal, she thinks she can make a run for it. She sprints toward me, eyes wide with panic, trying to reach for the door. As she passes me, my leg snaps out, sending her crashing to the marble floor with a brutal thump. She barely has time to gasp before Ty makes his way over, storming toward her like an absolute maniac. *My maniac.*

I take a step back, watching, heart pounding, as he lifts the axe. He doesn't hesitate. The blade comes down with a shocking crunch, embedding deep into her back. She screams, an intense, gut-wrenching sound, but it only seems to fuel him. He yanks the axe free, the sound of it dragging through bone and flesh echoing in the room, and then—without a second thought—he slams it down again, and again, and again, each blow ripping into her, carving her apart. Her screams dissolve into wet, ragged gasps, the life draining from her with every swing, until nothing but twitching remains.

Ty's eyes are expanded, unhinged, completely lost in the madness of it. And I stand there, breathing heavy, seeing it all, as the room fills with the coppery scent of death.

Suddenly, he turns, his hand—slick with blood—slams around my throat, the pressure so intense it steals the air from my lungs. I choke, completely caught off guard as his hold tightens. He drops his axe, cracking the marble floor, and growls against my lips. Without warning, he lifts me, my feet barely grazing the floor, my body straining as I claw at his wrist. His eyes are burning with a hunger that I've seen once before—an unsettling madness, something far deeper than desire.

Then, with a brutal shove, he sends me flying, my back slamming into the blood-soaked mattress. The mangled corpse of the man lies just inches from me, his blood soaking into the sheets and me. I scramble, pushing myself up onto my elbows, panic rushing through my veins. I stare at Ty, his muscles taut with fury, ripping off his hoodie and tossing it aside like it's nothing. His ski mask follows, and then his hands work on his belt, the sound of metal scraping against leather sending a shiver down my spine.

I look around, frantic, my eyes darting, searching for something—god knows what. The room is chaos, death festering in every corner. And yet, his focus is on me. When his belt is loose, he steps forward, slow and

deliberate. At the foot of the bed, he kneels on it, placing himself between my legs.

His hands clamp down on my waist, yanking me down toward him with brutal force. The hem of my hoodie is grabbed, ripped up my body in one swift motion, and tossed aside. Then his hands are on my sweatpants, yanking the waistband with a savage twist, ripping them and my panties down in one swift motion, leaving me completely naked—only my black boots remaining, my body vulnerable beneath him.

"Ty…" I stare into his eyes—dark, empty, and filled with only one thing: lust. The blood soaks into my back, drenches my skin. And I'm here, caught in the craziness of it all, doing nothing but waiting for him to take what he wants.

"I just want to violently fuck your pussy as warm blood drips down your soft skin, my little kitten. Is that too much to ask?"

I just blink blankly, a sick mix of fear and arousal sweeping through me before he lowers his mouth to my breast. His teeth graze my nipple, tugging it sharply, pulling it until it stings, and I can't help the hiss that escapes me, my back arching.

His mouth explores my body with a brutal, possessive rhythm. He bites sharply, marking me before he sucks, his lips tasting, until he's head is positioned between my thighs.

I feel his fingers wrap around the string of my tampon and the action feels like an intrusion. He pulls it out slowly, the humiliation making my body tighten, but I can't dwell on it. Not when his tongue follows, diving into my bloody pussy with relentless hunger.

I gasp, my head sinking back into the drenched mattress, my eyes rolling into the back of my head as I reach down, grabbing his hair with both hands. I clench tightly as he destroys me with his tongue and teeth, eating me like he's starved. He keeps me wide open, his fingers digging into my inner thighs as they shake from the sensations he's pulling from my body.

God, this man knows how to eat pussy, but bloody pussy? He's going crazy for it.

He grows savage, his control unravelling with every passing second. His tongue plunges inside me, probing, swirling with an animalistic growl that

vibrates against my core. The sensation sends shockwaves through me, and then he flattens his tongue, dragging it slowly up my slit. When his lips close around my throbbing clit, the suction is ruthless, drawing a sharp, uncontrollable cry from my throat.

“Oh, my—fuck…” The words rip free, raw and broken.

I buck against his mouth, every muscle tensing, straining against the ecstasy building inside me. My breaths come uneven, narrow, staggering on the edge of losing my damn mind.

And then, he pulls away.

The absence is devastating, leaving me trembling and throbbing, every nerve screaming for his tongue. Before I can even register it, he flips me onto my stomach in one swift, dominating motion. The sheets stick to my skin, wet with blood, smearing the crimson like warpaint before he lifts me off the bed.

Before I can push the tangled mess of red hair from my face, he shoves me forward, positioning me in front of a wall of mirrors. My legs nearly buckle beneath me, still trembling from the aftermath of his mouth, but my palms slam against the cold glass for support and blood streaks across it in chaotic smears.

He’s on me in an instant. His hand twists into my hair, tangling it tight around his fist, and yanks my head back with a sharpness that forces a hiss from my lips. My eyes snap up, finding his towering over me from behind. My period blood paints his chin, and his ravenous gaze drags down the back of my body as if he’s cherishing every inch of carnage he’s creating. His eyes lingering on the curve of my ass, his chest rising and falling with hunger.

Then, without warning, his fingers plunge inside me—two of them, quick, brutal, rough. A loud scream tears from my throat, but it’s silenced in an instant as he yanks my hair harder, snapping my head back further, becoming trapped between pain and pleasure, as he slides in another finger.

The stretch burns, and I squeeze my eyes shut, fighting the overwhelming sensations coursing through me. Yet, even as my body tenses, I don’t resist. I let him take what he wants from me, because somewhere, buried deep beneath the degradation and the pain, a shadow of desire always stirs—a dark truth I can’t deny. I fucking want this.

In the mirror, I watch as he lets a trail of spit fall from his lips. I don’t see where it lands until the wetness of his thumb circles my asshole, and then he pushes it inside me without hesitation. A deep, throaty moan spills from my lips, my eyes flutter closed as my body responds, helpless to the sensation.

His fingers move in sync now, easing deeper, spreading my holes open as he works all four in and out of me. As I start to feel full and almost overwhelmed, he releases my hair and his gloved hand slides around to the front of my throat, clutching me firmly. He tilts my head back until I have no choice but to meet his gaze above me again.

His lips hover near mine, the heat of his breath brushing against my skin as his pace shifts, fierce now. His fingers plunge inside me hard and fast, each thrust relentless, each movement made to shatter me. A scream rips from me, unrestrained, muffled only by his nearness. My legs tremble beneath me, threatening to give way under the intensity, but his hold keeps me upright, keeps me exactly where he wants me. His teeth grind down with each thrust. His eyes darkening as he watches me fall apart.

Just as the release tears through me, violent and uncontrollable, he rips all four fingers out of my body. The sudden emptiness leaves me gasping, the force of my orgasm hitting me like a wave, overpowering and devastating. My body quakes, and I sag against the mirror, only for him to twist his fingers back inside my pulsing pussy, the rough, slick action pulling another cry from my throat.

I feel everything—my come, my blood, hot and sticky as it streaks down my thighs, mixing into a chaos I can’t even begin to process. He doesn’t care. If anything, he fucking loves it. He loves showing his dominance over me and I crave it.

“Fuck, there’s something seriously wrong with you,” I moan against his lips.

He snickers, then curls all three of his fingers deep, dragging another scream from me. He releases my throat and grabs the back of my hair, pressing my forehead against the mirror.

“All this blood? I fucking love it. I love seeing your period dripping from your messy pussy. It drives me fucking insane,” he growls into my ear.

“Now watch what I do to you, beautiful girl. Watch how I make this gory cunthole contract around my cock.”

He yanks his fingers out of me, leaving me gasping at the sudden emptiness, before pulling his heavy, throbbing shaft free from his boxers. His grip shifts, one hand tangling in the back of my hair, holding me in place as the other guides himself to my pussy. My legs tremble, threatening to give out, as the swollen head of his dick drags up the slick slit. He pauses at the hole, teasing, pressing just enough to make me ache for more, before pushing inside.

The stretch is slow, and he makes me feel him, inch by agonizing inch and I tense as my body adjusts to the fullness of his big cock. My head dips, eyes drawn to the sight below and I watch him sink deeper, my pussy stretched out around his thick girth. He fills me completely until there’s absolutely nothing left to take.

When he’s fully buried inside, his satisfied growl rumbles against my ear, dark and animalistic, sending a thrill through me and I bite my bottom lip, pushing my ass back against him, preparing myself for the violence that he’s about to unleash.

There’s no hesitation. He drags his dick back and slams into me, the force of it knocking the air out of me. Again and again, he drives into me, each thrust savagely harsh, each one deeper than the last. His hips collide with my ass with brutal slaps, the sound of flesh meeting flesh echoing through the room. My body quakes under the onslaught, every nerve alive, my blood running hot as it streaks down my thighs with each punishing strike.

He shows me no mercy and it builds quickly, rising like something I can’t stop, crashing through me with an overwhelming power.

My climax tears through me, leaving me screaming, “Ty, oh, God!” as my pussy clenches tight around him, my release consuming me utterly.

My body trembles uncontrollably as Ty lifts me, his arm locked firmly around my waist, his cock still buried deep inside me. The strength in his movements feels effortless as he carries me to the bed once more. He drops me onto it, my hands and knees sinking into the soaked, bloody sheets. My fingers clutch the wet fabric instinctively, searching for stability, but my legs shake so violently I can barely hold myself upright.

With a force that winds me, he presses down on my back, making my arms buckle. My face smashes into the bed, the metallic tang of blood invading my senses. Before I can react, his hands grabs my wrists, yanking them behind me and pinning them in one massive hold.

I see him reach over to the body beside me. Then I hear it—a wet, grotesque squelching sound. My stomach churns. The sickly noise of blood and guts being disturbed fills the room, and panic flares in my chest.

Then I see it. From the corner of my eye, a length of intestine swings into view, glistening with gore. My eyes widen in horror, then I squeeze them shut, my entire body convulsing at the thought.

“No, no—too far, Ty!” I scream.

He fucking ignores me. The slimy, alien texture wraps around my wrists, cold and slick, making bile rise in my throat. The sensation alone is enough to make my head spin, my consciousness threatening to slip away.

He ties the red ropes with heavy, untamed breathes, as if my refusal fuels him, as if this moment—my terror—is his masterpiece.

Ty’s low chuckle, followed by sharp crack of his hand against my ass jolts me forward, and I let out a shriek, my skin stinging where his palm landed.

“Shut the fuck up and take it like I know you can, Red,” he growls, dripping with menace. “You’re not walking out of this room the same woman you once were. You’re here to be…”

Thrust, and I gasp.

“Fucking.”

Another thrust,

“Broken,” he snarls. “Physically. And mentally.”

Before I can respond—if I even dare—he’s already moving, his grasp rough and unrelenting. His hands clamp around my waist, yanking me closer to the edge of the bed.

He then spreads my ass wide, his fingers digging into the soft flesh with a bruising intensity. I can feel his eyes on me, devouring every inch as he watches himself slide in and out of my pussy, each movement slow and torturous.

As the wet sounds fill the room, a deep rumble pulls from his throat, and his head falls back, his neck rolling as if he's loving every second, every sensation. His clutches hard, his nails biting into my skin, and the possessiveness in his touch makes my stomach coil.

"My beautiful little bloody cum slut," he spits through tight teeth with frustration. "You know how to take me so well and I fucking love it."

His gaze snaps back to me, dark and fierce, and I watch from the corner of my eye as he starts ramping up the pace. His face contorts into a mask of pleasure and insanity as he smashing into the deepest depths of me repeatedly.

He fucks me sadistically for what feels like hours, cumming, then going again, forcing me into multiple orgasms continuously until we both can't physically take anymore. When I'm completely overflowing with his hot cum, he slides his heavy dick out of my swollen pussy, and I let out a gasp, my exhausted body falling forward. I try to draw air into my lungs, my entire body shaking violently and sweating. He drags his zipper back up with calm movements, watching me closely.

"Let's get out of here, freckles." He says and I groan as he lifts my lifeless body off the bed. When I stand, he holds me up and I feel blood and ridiculous amounts of his cum run down my legs.

We both glance down before looking at each other and we share a laugh despite the depravity of it all. His hand gently finds my cheek, his thumb sweeping across my cheek.

"You did good, little slayer. How do you feel?"

I take a small glance around, taking in the madness of it all before my eyes meet his. I wrap my arms around his neck, drawing his lips down to mine.

"I don't regret a single second." I whisper before shoving my tongue into his mouth.

He devourers me with a growl, pulling me closer to him, his hand grabbing my asscheek tightly and when he pulls away, leaving me breathless and tingling, he scans my eyes sinisterly.

"That's my fucking girl."

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Ty

It’s been a few day since I killed that couple with Raven and I’m staring down at my phone, my eyes scanning over a new text.

[You’re lucky to have me. To have us. Or your ass would have been back inside that fucking looney house by now.]

The words glow on the screen like a threat, sharp and mocking. My fingers around the phone squeeze, the edges biting into my palm as I stare at the fucked-up message, the pit in my stomach deepening. Who the fuck is this? And why the hell are they watching my back when I didn’t ask for it?

[Who’s this?] The text sends before I can think twice. It’s the first time I’ve bothered responding.

The reply comes almost immediately, as if they were waiting. *[Or maybe you belong there, like the rest of us, Slasher.]*

Slasher? My brows knit together as my mind twists around it, trying to figure out who’s trying to play games with me. My thoughts are a mess of frustration, but they’re cut short when Raven steps into the room.

She’s fresh from the shower, a towel draped around her body, her red damp hair clinging to her shoulders. I side-eye her briefly, noting the subtle worry etched into her face, before shoving my phone deep into the pocket of my jeans.

“You're going out again?” she asks, the unease threading her words impossible to miss.

I adjust the strap of the bag slung across my back, checking the weight of it and I don’t answer.

“Hey, what’s wrong?” she presses, her voice softer now, her concern peeling at my defences.

My jaw clenches as my thoughts snap back to where I'm headed. I can't explain this to her—not the mansion burned into my memory, not the man who owns it, not the years I've spent hunting for this place like it's the fucking key to everything. And it might be. It belongs to the man who took her, the last one who had my sister. The motherfucker is hiding behind a fortress of wealth and power, but I've seen what's beneath. The businesses, the connections—everything points to someone high up in the chain. Too high to touch. Higher than most.

Her hand brushes against my arm, light and unsure, trying to ground me. I pull away before it can stick. She doesn't get it. This isn't a fight I'm walking into—it's a fucking storm, and there's a good chance I won't make it out in one piece or alive. I know that. I've made peace with it. But she wouldn't. She'd try to stop me.

The words I want to say lodge in my throat. I glance at her, just for a second, the worry in her eyes enough to curl the knife of guilt deeper.

I turn to face her fully and slowly, my hands finding their way to the sides of her neck. My palms press against her warm skin, my thumbs brushing along her jawline as I tilt her head back. I lean in, placing my forehead against hers and as her small hands curl around my wrists, her touch levels me in a way I didn't know I needed. My thumbs glide gently over her cheeks, tracing the lines of her pretty face.

I search her eyes—those pretty, ocean-blue eyes flecked with concern and something delicate. My gaze moves lower, taking in the freckles dusted across her skin and those rosy, plump lips that part slightly, drawing me in. She's here, real, and for the first time in what feels like forever, the fucking chaos in my mind quiets. But it's replaced by a strange sadness. A reality I didn't think I'd be faced with. *Losing her.*

"You mean so much to me," I murmur, the quiet words tumbling out.

Her expression shifts, confusion forming in her eyes, but she doesn't pull away. She just waits as I continue. "Thank you, my beautiful girl, for understanding me."

Her lips part as if to speak, but the words don't come and I can feel my throat tightening, the raw ache of emotion welling up as tears burn hot behind my eyes.

“You saw me, and that’s all I ever really wanted,” I whisper as my tears spill over, trailing down my face and falling onto her skin like fragile confessions. “You saw through it all—the fucking darkness, the diagnosis, the murder, the madness, the train wreck of my fucking life.”

My gaze drops to her lips again, my thumb sliding across the soft curve of the bottom one and her hands tighten just slightly on my wrists. “You, Raven. You are what home should have felt like. Safe. Loved.”

I see the emotion in her eyes—the heartbreak, the understanding, the quiet pain. It’s too fucking much.

My eyes squeeze shut as if I can block it out as if that’ll make this any easier. “I’m sorry for putting you through the things I did.” The words are bitter on my tongue, an apology that feels too small for what I’ve done to her. I sniffle, forcing myself to open my eyes and meet hers again, to tell her the truth. “You’re just… everything I ever fucking wanted. Everything I ever needed.”

A tear slips from the corner of her eye, trailing down her cheek, and something in her softens—her defence, her hurt, maybe even her suspicion. She doesn’t say anything. She doesn’t have to. I can feel her aura, the way it holds me together even as I’m falling apart.

“At first, I wanted to dull your light, kitten. I hated how it clashed with my fucking darkness,” I shake my head once. “But please, don’t ever stop shining bright for me.”

Before she can respond, I press my lips to hers, hard and desperate, my hands shaking as they cradle her face, my thumbs brushing away the dampness of her tears. I kiss her again, and again, each time as if it will be enough to explain what my words can’t.

And then, before I let myself sink any further, I pull back. My hands drop from her face, the warmth of her slipping away like something I don’t deserve to fucking hold.

“Ty…” Her voice is weak behind me, almost pleading, but I don’t look back.

I grab my axe, swing the door open and step out into the night, leaving it unlocked for the first time.

…

The mansion looms in front of me, a monolith of sleek, black stone against the endless void of night. It looks like it belongs to a fucking kingpin.

My mind drifts back to Raven—her innocent face, those piercing eyes that see too much, the way she stirs something in me I didn't know I could ever feel. How she keeps digging into the hollow parts of me, pulling at things I didn't even know were there.

I was so close to staying. So close to stopping myself from doing this.

But I can't.

My mind, my soul—if I even have one—they're too far gone. There's no peace for me until this is done. Until I get answers. Until this cunt is dead and I can finally stop choking on the questions that haunt me every time I close my fucking eyes.

I squeeze them shut now, just for a moment, and her face is there again, softening the edges of my rage. It makes me want to fucking scream.

I shake my head sharply, growling low under my breath as I push her out of my thoughts.

This ends tonight.

I crouch behind a tree at the edge of the property, the bark rough against my gloves, and I scan the back of the house. The pool lies still, an eerie mirror beneath the faint glow of garden lights. Somewhere in the distance, the sharp barks of dogs cut through the silence.

My gaze locks onto movement through the wide downstairs windows. A figure drifts past—him. Dressed in a velvet red robe and silk pants, he looks as if he doesn't have a care in the fucking world. A cigar smokes between his fingers, smoke curling lazily into the air, while a glass of whiskey glints in his other hand. A book is tucked against his side like this is just another quiet night for him.

I bite down on my teeth. It's him. No mistaking it. I remember that ugly face. Ricco.

The night feels too still, too calm for the vicious murder that's about to take place. I unzip my bag slowly, keeping my eyes locked on his silhouette. My gloved hand finds the handle of my axe before I rise, pulling it free. He moves toward a chair now, settling himself in front of a roaring

fireplace visible through the glass. He lounges there, oblivious. My pulse quickens, the blood in my ears a steady drum.

This is it. The moment I've fucking planned for. There's no turning back.

I leave my bag behind and creep toward the mansion, sticking to the walls like a ghost slipping between shadows. My steps are soundless on the damp grass before I move along the side of the mansion, scanning the windows and doors for weaknesses.

The glass door I first spot is locked—figures. My gaze shifts upward, catching a balcony with French doors, not to high up for me.

I tiptoe, sliding my axe on the balcony floor before grabbing the smooth edge, then haul myself up, my boots scraping slightly against the wall as I climb. The muscles in my arms strain, but I make it, swinging my leg over the railing and landing in a low crouch. The French doors are locked too, but the latch is old, decorative rather than functional.

I lean down, grabbing my axe and slip the blade between the seam and twist until the latch pops with a click. Quietly, I push the door, slipping inside like a phantom.

The air inside is warm and the hallway ahead is dimly lit, the only light coming from the faint glow downstairs. I hold my axe tighter and move through the house with silent steps until I reach the top of the grand staircase, and when I look below, I see it's a huge open study. The firelight flickers as I search the quiet aera until I spot him, sitting in a leather armchair with his back to me.

My jaw clenches as I straighten, then step forward. I glide across the marble floor, silent even against the crackling hiss of the fire. When I reach the bottom of the stairs, the glow from the study spills over me, but I don't stop.

Both hands tighten around the axe handle as I move closer, quicker, my focus narrowing to the man seated in the chair.

"Ahhh, Ty Easton…" Ricco's voice cuts through the room, smooth and mocking, and I freeze. "I've been waiting for you."

He rises slowly, taking his time, and turns to face me. His eyes—icy, greedy, unfeeling—lock onto mine, and every drop of blood in my body

rushes to my head. Wrath vibrates through me, coiling in my body, begging to explode.

He takes me in, lazily assessing, the cigar still smoking between his lips as his other hand remains calmly by his side.

“You haven’t changed a bit, kid. Sacred Heights did nothing for you, I see.”

“SHUT THE FUCK UP!” My roar tears through the room, raw and sharp, bouncing off the high ceilings like a physical force.

He doesn’t even move. Just stares at me, his callous gaze almost amused.

“Where the fuck is she? Where did you put her?”

“Penny?” His lips curl into a smirk, and the sound of her name on his tongue makes me see red.

I don’t answer. Words are beneath me now.

He gestures lazily to a door on the far left, his tone casual, uninterested. “Oh, she’s at the back.”

The air feels like it’s been sucked from the room. My brows knit together, my heart plummeting like a stone. I almost shake my head, denying his words, but the faint creak of a door opening snaps my attention.

My eyes dart to the sound, my blood turning cold as three massive men stride into the room. Their suits are pristine, every button waxed, their polished shoes clicking ominously against the marble floor.

My mind spins, calculating. Four of them. I’ll have to take down all four of them or die trying. My hold on my axe strengthens, my knuckles white against the leather of my gloves.

But none of it matters. None of them matter.

All I care about is Penny.

He clicks his fingers, a sharp sound that cuts through the tension like a knife. One of the suited men steps forward before he hands something to Ricco, and it takes a second for my brain to register what I’m looking at.

An urn.

“She’s right here,” he says with a smug, venomous smirk, holding it out like some fucked-up trophy.

My blood turns to ice, freezing and boiling at the same time. My chest squeezes, my lungs forgetting how to pull air. The world tilts, my vision narrowing to nothing but that urn and his sadistic grin.

Then it happens.

I don’t think. I don’t plan. I just move.

A roar tears from my throat, rough and painful, as I lunge forward, the axe high above my head. My boots thunder against the floor as I charge, every muscle in my body tightened with murderous intent.

The first man is on me in an instant, slamming into my side, but I don’t budge. The impact barely registers as I spin, swinging the axe with all the force I can summon. The blade slices clean through his throat, blood spraying out as he collapses, gurgling on the floor.

I don’t stop.

Another comes at me, but he’s too slow. My axe curves through the air, catching him across the stomach and the sharp blade digs deep, tearing through fabric, flesh, and bone. His scream echoes through the room as he drops to his knees, clutching at his spilling guts.

Suddenly, a deafening crack rings out.

Pain explodes in my leg, white-hot and searing, like a burning poker driven straight through the muscle. My knee buckles, and I crash to the floor with a hiss, my axe slipping from my grip as I clutch at my leg. Blood pools beneath me, thick and warm, spreading across the cold marble.

I bite down hard, refusing to let the agony consume me, and reach for the axe, but one of the guys kick it away. When I lift my head, I’m met with the cold steel of a gun barrel pressed firmly against my forehead.

Ricco looms over me, his smirk is wider now, more triumphant and the gun trembles in his hand, not from fear but from excitement.

“You really thought you could come here and kill me, didn’t you? Do you know who the fuck I am?” His tone is smug, like he’s enjoying his powerful pitiful moment. “I saw it the moment I took her—that fire in your eyes. A kid with a vengeance.” His grin widens. “And I fucking loved it.”

My jaw locks so hard it feels like my teeth might shatter as he steps closer. He leans in. “After around ten of us fucked her virgin pussy, she was

nothing but a lifeless fucking corpse anyway, Ty.”

His words are acid in my veins, biting and harsh, and the tears I’ve fought so hard to hold seem to burn my dry eyes. My vision blurs, and I lower my head.

“I did her a favor. She was like a wounded animal. I put her out of her misery.”

My head snaps up, rage burning through the tears and my eyes lock onto his, wide and unhinged. Before I can stop myself, I spit. A thick glob hits him square in the face, sliding down his cheek.

The man beside me growls, grabbing me by the scruff of my shirt, but I laugh—a mentally unstable sound that echoes throughout the huge room, high-pitched and sudden.

Ricco wipes the spit from his face with a forceful movement, his icy stare never leaving mine.

“You think this is funny?” he hisses, his calm surface cracking as the first hint of anger slips through.

My laughter only grows louder, my shoulders jerking, the sound developing into something manic, something fucked.

“You’re dead,” I whisper through the laughter before my lips curl into a defiant grin. “You’re already fucking dead.”

The gun suddenly smashes into my face with a sickening crack, the impact snapping my head back as pain explodes across my cheekbone. Blood floods my mouth, pooling on my tongue and spilling from my split lips, but it doesn’t stop me.

I spit the blood onto the floor before another broken, rasping bubble of laughter forces its way out bitterly, dripping with madness. I grin up at him, teeth slick with crimson, mocking him further.

“I will kill you, you little cunt!” Ricco snarls, his face contorted in irritation as he shoves the barrel of the gun against my head.

His chest heaves as he stares me down, veins bulging in his neck. Then, without warning, he spins on his heel, the urn still clutched in his hand. With a loud roar, he hurls it through the air.

Time seems to slow until the urn smashes against the edge of the fireplace, shards of pottery raining down as Penny's ashes spill into the flames. The heat churns her remains into spiraling wisps of smoke, rising and twisting into the air.

I watch through blurred, blood-streaked vision as the room spins around me. Everything hits me at once, crushing me under its weight: Penny's face, her laughter, her screams. The years of planning in Sacred Heights, every moment leading up to this, the lies, the bloodshed. Raven's voice, her soft moans and touch. It all swirls around me like the fucking ashes drifting in the firelight.

And then, something snaps.

"SO FUCKING DO IT!" I bellow, the sound ripping from my throat.

Ricco freezes, his hand tightening on the gun.

I grab the barrel with both hands, forcing it harder against my skull. My fingers curl around the cold steel, white-knuckled and shaking, but I don't care. My head tilts, wild eyes meeting his with a vicious stare.

"Come on, Ricco. Don't be a fucking pussy now." My voice drips with venom, a low growl vibrating in my chest. "Blow my fucking brains out. Do it. End it, you sick fuck!"

He stares at me, his rage flashing into something else. Unease, hesitation. His handshakes, just a little, but enough for me to notice. Tears stream down my cheeks as I breathe violently, my chest heaving like a caged animal ready to maul its captor.

His lips curl into a snarl, but his eyes betray him.

"No," he whispers, a chilling calm washing over him. "I'm not into fucking full-grown psychopathic men," he says. "But I know a few who would love to eat you alive and spit your ass out. Let's finish what your parents started, shall we?" He seethes before leaning in closer, his lips curling into a deranged smile as he whispers, "Only then will you find your place with pretty Penny. In my firepit where I roast my fucking marshmallows while thinking about how she felt around my cock that night."

Suddenly, from the darkness beyond the huge window to my right, something catches my eye—two spiraling black-and-white circles. They

hover there, perfectly still, staring back at me. At first, I think I'm fucking tripping or it's a trick of the firelight reflecting off the glass, but no.

They're steady. Watching me.

Then, as if summoned, two red spirals appear just above them, glowing faintly, almost pulsing. The red deepens, swirling faster, and then green spirals appear below, completing the bizarre trio.

The spirals bore into me, their hypnotic pull impossible to ignore. Each color churns like an endless vortex, the black-and-white centres spinning slowly while the red and green glow eerily, flickering in the night.

What the fuck is that? My mind struggles to make sense of what I'm seeing—eyes. Are they fucking eyes?

"Or maybe I should take… What's her name? Raven?"

My eyes flash to Ricco's in an instant and his smirks. My heart thumps hard in my chest. Not Raven. Not my kitten.

"Take him to the dungeon," Ricco snarls before his dickhead puppet grabs me by the collar, dragging me across the marble floor.

Before I can even plan my next move, the window to my right explodes and something extremely fast whistles through the air like a streak of lightning.

The man above me chokes, his grip faltering as a wet, gurgling groan escapes him. A spray of warm blood rains down on me, splattering across my face before his heavy body collapses with a sickening crack against the marble, his dead weight crumpling beside me.

Everything slows again and my vision narrows. My heartbeat slams against my ribs, but my instincts scream louder. I stretch out, fingers clawing for my axe, and as soon as I feel its cold steel handle, I grab it tightly and roll onto my back.

Ricco moves like a cobra, the muzzle of his gun aimed squarely for my skull. He fires, the deafening sound echoing like thunder, but before the bullet reaches me, another sharp whistle cuts through the air.

A knife flies from the broken window and embeds itself deep into Ricco's wrist. He howls in agony, his aim snapping wide. The bullet slams into the floor, an inch away from my head, ricocheting into the room.

Ricco screams, clutching his wrist as blood pours from the wound and his gun slips from his grasp, banging to the floor.

My blood surges, adrenaline drowning out every other sensation. Without hesitation, I leap to my feet, axe in hand, and roar as I swing it. The blade cuts clean through his leg, slicing it off mid-thigh. He collapses with a shriek, his cries echo through the room, but I don't stop. I fucking won't.

I raise the axe again, bringing it down with savage force until his other leg is severed, the bone cracking like brittle wood. Blood pools beneath him, but it's not enough.

I'm not done. It's not enough. She needs to feel it beyond the grave.

I swing the axe again and again, severing each arm at the shoulder, the splatter of warm, sticky blood painting me with every blow and I drown in the fucking feeling. His screams dissolve into wet gurgles, his limbs are now to twitching stumps.

Finally, I meet his eyes. He's choking on his own blood, spitting weakly, his face a mask of pain and terror.

"Another one in hell. You won't be able to fucking hurt innocents there, Ricco. Only you suffer," I snarl, tears streaming down my face, mingling with the blood dripping from my chin.

With a final roar, I raise the axe high above my head and bring it down with all the strength left in my trembling body. The blade splits his face down the middle, halving the bone and flesh, opening him up like a ripe fucking melon.

I don't stop. I continue swinging, over and over, my vision blurred by rage and grief, his remains turning to unrecognizable pulp beneath me. I keep going until my arms ache, until there's nothing left of Ricco but carnage.

Only then do I finally fall to my knees, the axe slipping from my grasp with a dull thud. I hyperventilate as I sit there, head bowed, eyes clenched shut, trying to silence the screams still echoing in my skull.

Then I hear it—a low rumble, growing louder. *Motorbikes*.

My ears prick, every muscle snapping to attention as the faint growl filters through the night. I scramble to my feet, nearly slipping on the slick bloody floor beneath me. I stagger toward the shattered floor-to-ceiling

window, dragging my wounded leg behind me before my gaze locks onto the treeline.

Through the shadows of the pitch-black woods, three motorcycles whizz through, riding away, their taillights blinking through the darkness. The sound of their menacing laughter reaches my ears, even over the roar of the engines, chilling and unhinged.

My gaze narrows, feeling a mix of confusion and suspicion. The distant sound of the motorcycles fades into the night, leaving me alone with the aftermath. I turn around slowly, my eyes sweeping over the chaos behind me.

I take a shuffle forward, my boots squelching in the thick pool spreading beneath Ricco's remains. My mind races, trying to piece together what the fuck just happened.

Something glints near the edge of the massacre. A knife.

I crouch down, my muscles shuddering as adrenaline drains from me, and reach out with shaky fingers. The blade feels cold and alien as I lift it into the light.

It's a throwing knife with swirling engravings wrapped around the blade and handle, almost hypnotic in their design. Just like the eyes peering back at me.

My brows furrow as I study it, turning it over in my hand. It's not random, not something you'd find lying around. This is crafted for accuracy, for skill—for someone who knows how to fucking kill.

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

Raven

In the motel room, the silence suffocates me. The clock ticks slowly, the minute hand dragging like it knows how much time I'm wasting, pacing in restless circles. My hands shake violently, my thoughts a tangled mess of panic and fear. Where is he? Where the hell did Ty go? His words echo in my head, the way he sounded—something was off. The door was left unlocked, he left it unlocked. Why would he do that? He never gives me the option to go. *He never wants me to leave him.*

Every nerve in my body screams at me, urging me to act, but I can't. I'm stuck, trapped in this fucking panic. I thought I could breathe, that it was just my mind working against me, but no... My heart sinks lower with every passing second.

Suddenly, a sharp knock at the door pulls me out of my spiraling thoughts. My pulse spikes. Without even thinking, I rush toward it and when I swing it open, my heart plummets to the pit of my stomach.

"Well, hello, Ms. Tate."

My eyes widen. Dr Moss. Why is he here? What the fuck is he doing here? My entire body goes still as my mind scrambles to process what's happening.

I shake my head once, unable to form a single word. Two men, dressed in stark white coats, stand behind him like shadows, their eyes cold and empty.

"It's good to see you too!" he chirps, his voice far too chipper, like nothing is wrong before he steps inside, forcing me to take one back.

"Is Ty here?" Dr Moss asks, his eyes sweeping over the cramped motel room.

I feel the heaviness of his gaze and instinctively wrap my arms around myself. Something's wrong. *Why is he here?* The walls seem to close in as my heart races as I try to control the panic that's threatening to rise.

"Why… Why are you here?" I ask as I tuck my hair behind my ear, trying to force some composure into my shaking hands.

He stops, his smile widening unnervingly, a grin that doesn't reach his eyes. "I think you need some help, Raven."

My brows crease with confusion. "Help?" I repeat, almost as if saying it out loud will make sense of the situation, but it doesn't.

He takes a step forward, and I take one back.

"Yes, help," he says, a little too eagerly.

Before I can process what's happening, the two men in white coats move, their hands shooting out to grab me. Panic surges through me, and I thrash in their hold, desperately trying to break free.

"Let go of me!" I scream, my voice hoarse with terror and anger.

"Take her to Sacred Heights Asylum," Dr Moss orders steadily.

My eyes snap to his, wide with disbelief. I can feel my stomach churn as his words sink in.

"What the fuck are you talking about? I don't work for you anymore… I…" My voice cracks, desperate for an answer, but I can already feel it—that creeping dread swarming through my veins.

"Oh, not as a worker." He responds with the same eerie calm, his smile now curling into something darker. "As a patient."

His words hit me like a slap, and my blood runs cold. My body goes rigid, every instinct screaming at me to fight, to run, but before I can do anything, I feel a sharp, searing pain in my neck. My hand shoots up instinctively, but the damage is already done. Something cold and foreign is pulled out of my skin, leaving behind a burning sensation that spreads through my veins like wildfire.

My vision starts to blur, the edges of the room warping into shadows, and I feel my legs give out beneath me. I try to scream, to say something, anything, but the words catch in my throat as my body betrays me.

“Raven Tate, needs to be cured,” Dr Moss says, his voice distant, muffled by the fog creeping into my mind.

And then, nothing.

The darkness consumes me.

…

Suddenly, my eyes snap open, and a sharp gasp escapes me as the brightness above sears through my blurry vision from above. I squeeze my eyes shut, desperate to block out the light, but it’s no use. The migraine in my head throbs and my heart hammers in my chest, panic rising with each second I can’t remember.

I try to move, to sit up, but I’m violently yanked back. Straps. Everywhere. My arms, my neck, my legs—all bound, tight, restricting. A scream tears from my throat, high-pitched, broken with desperation and terror.

I jerk against the restraints, my body trembling as tears stream from my eyes. The cold air bites against my exposed skin. Every inch of me is bare, and my eyes dart down, horrified, to confirm it. I’m completely fucking naked, every ounce of dignity stripped away in this sterile, alien place.

What the fuck.

I try to piece together my memories, but they feel shattered, as if they’ve been pulled apart and scattered. Dr Moss. The men in white. Sacred Heights. The needle. Oh God, what have they fucking done to me?

Fear claws up my throat, and my stomach churns with nausea. I try to scream again, but my voice breaks.

“Help... Help me,” I whisper, my eyes darting to the person to my right as my fingers strain to reach out.

I feel the coldness of the table beneath me, the sharp pressure of the restraints digging into my skin, and the air smells sterile, like chemicals and antiseptic. I’m somewhere in Sacred Heights.

The figures in white, their backs turned, are moving quietly around the room, preparing... something. I can’t see what the fuck it is, but I know it won’t be good. My eyes flicker across the room in desperation, scanning every corner. Shelves of bottles and jars line the walls, and I can make out

tools—old, sharp things I've never seen before. Nothing in here looks like anything I know. Everything feels foreign. Foreign, and wrong. Like a fucking torture chamber.

The door creaks open by my feet, and my heart jumps into my throat. I glance down as Dr Moss enters, and he wears white scrubs while he pulls latex gloves over his hands. They snap tight as he finishes, the sound of them sharp, clinical.

I want to shrink away, to cover myself, to hide under this fucking table or even claw my way through the walls if I have to, but I can't move. I'm completely naked, completely exposed and vulnerable.

He stops at the foot of the table, and I force myself to stay still, clenching my teeth to keep from crying out. I can feel his eyes on me, assessing, judging, as if I'm nothing more than a specimen to be experimented on.

I squeeze my eyes shut and bite my lip so hard I almost taste blood, trying to push the panic down, trying to convince myself this isn't happening. *Wake up, Raven. Wake the fuck up.*

But nothing changes. This is real.

"Ready to begin?" Dr Moss's voice cuts through the silence and It's almost like he's speaking to himself more than to me.

I can't respond. I can barely breathe. What does he fucking mean, ready to begin?

Dr Moss steps closer to the table, his hands moving carefully across the array of tools and equipment beside him. I feel my heart rate spike, every nerve in my body firing as my eyes dart toward the machine he's preparing.

It's old—too old.

Wires crisscross over the surface like veins, leading to thick, metal clamps that gleam under the harsh lights above. My throat constricts as I realize what this is. My stomach lurches, and a wave of nausea sweeps over me.

Electroshock therapy.

The very thought of it sends chills down my spine. I've heard about it, read about it—the horrors. The way it can scramble your mind, tear apart

your memories, make you forget who you are.

“No,” I whisper shakily because it’s all I can manage.

Dr Moss doesn’t even look at me as he approaches the machine. His face remains as impassive as ever, focused solely on what he’s about to do to me. He adjusts the knobs, checking the settings, and the faint crackle of electricity makes the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end.

“Please... don’t do this,” I sob, tears pouring out of my eyes.

He glances up then, a brief flash of something like amusement crossing his face. It’s sickening. My body tenses as he steps forward, stopping right beside me, his gaze sweeping over my naked body.

“Don’t worry, Ms Tate,” he says with a sinister calm. “This will help you. You just need to accept it. You’ve been broken and you need fixing.”

I hyperventilate as he shifts behind me and I feel the restraints pulling tighter as he places the metal clamps against my temples, and a fresh wave of fear crashes over me.

The cold metal sinks into my skin, and I wince as the electricity hums in the air. My body reacts involuntarily, heart pounding in my chest as I try to pull away. But I can’t.

“Please... No, please...” I beg again, desperation lacing every word.

“Quiet now. I’m going to make you feel better. Pull all those horrid memories out of you.” Dr Moss whispers, the words deceptively gentle as he moves to the control panel. He flips a switch, and the machine comes to life with a throbbing hum.

I squeeze my eyes shut, bracing myself for the pain I know is coming. I can feel the power surging, building behind the machine, and my whole body instinctively goes rigid in anticipation. I can’t escape it. I can’t even move.

“Here we go,” he says softly, but the words send a cold chill through my bones.

And then, without any further warning, it hits me.

The shock crashes through my head like a thunderclap, and I gasp, my body shaking violently against the restraints. My heart skips a beat, the

world circling, the shock burning through every nerve like fire, tearing through my thoughts, my awareness.

I scream, the pain is unbearable, like it's ripping my very soul apart. The voltage hits again, a steady, persistent pulse that feels like it's going to tear me apart. I try to inhale and exhale, but it's impossible. The air feels thick, overpowering, and the pain just keeps approaching, one shock after another.

"Relax, Ms Tate. Let it go. You'll be better after this. I promise."

Each surge of electricity yanks at my very core, stealing more and more of my mind with every passing second. My body twitches, convulses, the pain is agonising, and I scream again, but my throat is raw, and I can't escape it.

The world is starting to cloud, fading in and out, but every part of me is crying for it to stop. For me to wake up. For this nightmare to end.

But it doesn't.

It just keeps going and going.

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CHAPTER TWENTY

Ty

As I stagger across the motel parking lot, my eyes lock on the door to our room, the only place I want to be right now. I need to see her, touch her, fucking hold her—remind myself she's real. That she's mine. It's over. For now, at least. And nothing else fucking matters but keeping her with me.

Reaching the door, I lean against the wall beside it, my forehead pressing into the rough surface. My chest rises and falls heavily, the searing pain in my leg making my whole-body ache. I let out a strained groan, grit my teeth, and slam my hand down on the handle. The door swings open, and I hobble inside.

But the second I step in, everything feels wrong.

My eyes scan the room, and my heart starts to pound harder, faster.

"Kitten?" I call out.

Silence.

I limp further inside, each step feeding my growing dread. I peer into the bathroom, praying she's there, but it's empty.

I spin around, panic clawing at my insides, thinking she's took the opportunity to escape me, but then, my gaze darts to her suitcase—still there. Midnight, stretches lazily in the corner, unaffected by the chaos brewing inside me. She wouldn't leave without her Midnight. She wouldn't leave without me. Would she?

My eyes catch something near the door and my stomach twists. I hobble toward it until I crouch down and snatch it off the floor.

A syringe.

My hands tremble as I stare at it, the hollow needle catching the faint light and a cold realization washes over me, setting my blood on fire.

“Fuck,” I growl before yanking the door open, adrenaline surging through me despite the pain in my leg, and storm across the lot toward the reception office.

I burst through the door, the bell above jangling violently. The receptionist is nowhere to be seen, so I storm up to the counter and slam my hand down on the bell repeatedly until she finally appears, her expression as blank and unbothered as ever.

She steps out from the back room, wiping her hands on a rag.

“Name,” she says without lifting her eyes and my face scrunches up with rage.

My blood boils as I slam the syringe down onto the counter with enough force to make her flinch. She finally looks up at me, noticing I’m covered in head to toe in some fuckers blood and her eyes expand.

“No fucking name. Where is she?” I snarl, teetering on the edge of a roar.

She blinks, her brows raising slightly. “I don’t know who you’re talking about,” she says, her tone dismissive.

The lie hits me like a slap and I lean over the counter, my face inches from hers, my eyes boring into her.

“Don’t. Fucking. Lie. To. Me,” I hiss, each word a death threat. “Where the fuck is she? Where’s my girl?”

Her calm facade fades for a split second and her lips part, her gaze flicking away, and I see the faintest crack in her composure. She fucking knows something.

“I don’t—” she starts, but I cut her off by slamming my palm onto the counter again, harder this time before shoving a bloody finger at her.

“Don’t waste my fucking time!” I roar. “Who was here? Did anyone come to my room? Did you see anything?”

She shifts uncomfortably, her arms crossing over her chest as her gaze darts around the room, avoiding mine. “There... there was a guy earlier,” she finally stammers. “A doctor, I think. He had some men with him. They asked about your room.”

The words hit me like a gut punch, and my stomach twists into a sickening knot. My breathing quickens, my hands curling into fists so tight my nails dig into my palms.

“A fucking doctor?” I echo. “What did he look like?”

She hesitates, her eyes flicking toward the back room as if she’s debating running, but I step closer, towering over her, and the look of my fury pins her in place.

“Tall,” she finally mumbles. “Older. Grey hair. Polite. White shirt and black pants, but... something about him felt off. He smiled too much. It was... creepy.”

“Where did they go?” I demand sharply.

“I don’t know!” she pleads, stepping back, her hands raised in defence. “They didn’t say much. Just left—maybe two hours ago! There was a white van—”

“A white van?” I echo.

“Yes! One of those medical ones. Like the kind hospitals use to carry supplies.”

My mind spins, images flashing in my head. White van. Medical. Dr fucking Moss.

Her words pound through me, each detail pulling the noose tighter around my throat. My teeth grind together as my eyes squeeze shut.

They took her.

Without another word, I spin on my heel and storm out the office, heading straight for the motel room. The door slams shut behind me, and I waste no time. I limp into the bathroom and lean heavily against the sink, my reflection glaring back at me in the cracked mirror.

Blood stains my leg, the wound throbbing, each pulse a grim reminder of how fucking useless I am like this. Gritting my teeth, I grab the medical kit from under the sink and yank it open.

With no hesitation, I dig into the wound, my hands shaking but steady enough to extract the bullet. A low growl of pain rips from my throat, but I grit through it, tossing the bloody slug into the sink. I press a clean towel

against the hole, wrapping it tightly before securing it with a makeshift bandage.

As I work, my thoughts race. Why Sacred Heights? Why her?

Is it a trap? Or is it something else? What the fuck would they want with Raven? My mind hurts with questions, each one twisting the knife deeper inside me. But none of it matters. Trap or fucking not, I'm going in. My little kitten needs me.

When the wound is secure, I stagger to my feet, stripping off my bloodstained clothes. I clean myself up as best I can before slipping into fresh jeans and a black hoodie. The weight of what I have to do settles on me like a heavy coat, but it sharpens my focus.

Now I've got to break inside an institution that held me prisoner for fifteen years… But how?

Before I leave, I scoop up Midnight, holding her against my chest. She meows softly, her tiny body warm against mine, and I bury my face in her black fur for a moment.

"I'll bring Mommy home," I whisper, scratching under her chin. "Where she belongs. I promise."

Her orange eyes stare up at me as if she understands, her soft purr vibrating against my chest. I set her down gently, making sure there's plenty of water and food for her. My fingers linger on her head, stroking her one last time before I stand.

I take a slow glance around the room, my fists clenching before squaring my shoulders and stepping outside, shutting the door behind me.

Time to bring her back. Or die fucking trying.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Raven

In a haze, my body feels weightless as I'm hoisted from the cold, hard table. My head flops forward and the scratchy fabric of a patient gown is pulled over me. The rough hands of two female nurses tug and yank, uncaring to my limp form.

"Please…" The word barely escapes my cracked lips, a whisper so faint I barely hear it myself.

But they ignore me. No response, no hesitation. Their hands just continue to shove and pull on me like I'm a lifeless doll.

The sharp sting of their callous treatment stirs something deep inside me and a spark of rage ignites beneath the fog clouding my mind. It grows quickly, feeding on the humiliation and the helplessness coursing through me.

I thrash suddenly, the burst of energy catching them off guard. My head snaps back, and a high-pitch scream tears from my throat. My body bucks against their hands as I swipe wildly, striking one of them across the face.

But I'm soon crushed as more hands descend on me, pinning me down with overwhelming force. Five, maybe six of them; I can't tell through the haze, their figures blending into a flurry of white and shadows. I scream again, my throat burning as I writhe, kicking, twisting, desperate to break free.

"Hold her down!" one of them barks.

My heart pounds in my chest, adrenaline surging as I fight like a cornered animal. But they're too strong, too many. My limbs are forced together, pressed painfully against my chest. The sound of something being secured around me reaches my ears before I feel it—the constriction, the suffocating embrace of thick fabric tightening around my arms and torso.

“No!” I scream, my voice cracking as I thrash harder, the fight instinctively clawing its way back to the surface.

My movements are jerky, desperate, but they finish strapping me into the straightjacket. The final buckle clicks, sealing me inside this prison of cloth and straps.

I’m yanked upright, but my legs give out beneath me, completely useless. My knees scrape against the cold floor as I’m hoisted off the table by my arms. Pain shoots through my shoulders, but the nurses grunt with effort, dragging my limp form across the tiled floor.

My head hangs forward, red hair falling into my face. They don’t speak as they haul me away, the sound of my bare feet scraping against the floor behind me.

…

The sound of the heavy lock sliding into place behind me echoes through me and I manage to lift my head, using every ounce of strength I have left, my vision swimming as I try to piece together my surroundings. The glowing brightness of the room burns into my irises, and I squeeze my eyes shut against it.

When I’m thrown forward, I crash onto a soft, spongey surface. The impact knocks the air out of my lungs, and a groan slips from my lips. The padded floor beneath me shifts slightly under my weight as I struggle to move, my restrained arms making it nearly impossible. I twist, rolling onto my back, panting as panic claws at my chest.

The walls around me are padded too—thick and white. The room feels like a coffin, cold and suffocating, its brightness adding to my growing sense of dread. My gaze darts wildly, frantically, until movement catches my eye.

A figure steps into the room slowly, and I try to focus on the silhouette, then my blurred vision sharpens just enough for me to make out… Jess?

She’s wearing a doctor’s outfit, pristine white, with her hair pulled back neatly. Her sweet smile is strangely out of place, as if she’s stepped out of a manipulated version of reality.

“Hello, Raven,” she says softly, and it slices through the madness raging in my mind like a scalpel. “How are you feeling?”

I force myself upright, adrenaline kicking in and I shake my head, disoriented and desperate. “Jess? You have to help me… You have to…”

Her expression shifts, her smile faltering as her eyes darken. “We are helping you, Raven.” The warmth in her tone chills, and I feel the air leave the room.

“You took a dark turn, little lamb. But we’re going to make you all better.”

“No!” I shake my head violently, tears stinging my eyes. “I’m not sure… it’s not…” My voice cracks as a tear slips down my cheek, the words caught in my throat like razor blades.

“You killed people, Raven.”

I recoil as she suddenly thrusts her face close to mine, her smile now gone, replaced by something she is

cruel.

“You fucking killed my fiancé,” she hisses.

My eyes widen, the accusation hitting me like a physical blow. “No… I… I didn’t…”

“You fucking did, Raven.” Her tone trembles with fury, her body taut with restrained violence. “You were an accomplice. With your…” Her lips screw into a mocking sneer. “What did you call him? Your brother?”

The room feels like it’s spinning. I’m too tired, too broken, too confused to process her fucking words. Jess straightens slightly, her gaze raking over me with cold disgust. She takes a step closer, her hand moving to a lock of my hair, winding the red strands gently between her fingers.

“You have such beautiful hair,” she murmurs. “And it’s such a shame…”

I recoil at the word. “Shame?” I whisper, my stomach sinking.

Her other hand moves, and my breath catches in my throat when I see what she’s holding—a pair of gleaming scissors.

“Yes,” she says. “That I have to cut it all off. Rules are rules.”

The sound of the scissors snapping open and closed fills the room and I twist, trying to scoot away, but the jacket restrains me, holding me captive as she kneels closer.

“No, Jess,” I beg. “Please, don’t… don’t do this… I didn’t.”

Her smile returns, mean and harsh, as she tilts her head. “You don’t get to plead, Raven. Not anymore. This is for your own good.”

The first snip echoes in the sterile room, the sound razor-sharp and final. A chunk of my hair falls to the padded floor, crimson against the pale white.

“No!” I scream, thrashing against the restraints, my body jerking wildly. My cries are desperate, echoing off the padded walls. “Jess, stop! Please, don’t!”

She doesn’t give a fuck, her face coldly determined as the scissors bite into another lock of my hair.

“Stop moving, Raven,” Jess orders.

But I don’t stop. I can’t. I twist, trying to throw her off, my muscles burning from the energy, but the straightjacket holds me fast. The more I fight, the tighter it feels, constricting like a snake around my chest.

Another snip. Then another. My cries turn to sobs, and the tears flow freely down my face. She ignores me and just works, yanking my head back when I try to pull away. My hair, my identity—it falls in uneven chunks, stripped from me, piece by piece.

By the time she’s done, the air feels colder, harsher against my exposed scalp. My sobs have turned into quiet, gasping whimpers as I sit slumped against the wall, shaking.

Jess steps back, brushing her hands off like she’s finished a chore. The scissors clatter onto a nearby tray, and she gazes at me with a cruel smile, satisfaction glinting in her eyes.

“You look better already,” she says with a mocking tone, tilting her head to admire her work.

I can’t even respond as I curl into myself, cornering into the wall until I’m a ball on the padded floor. My tears drip onto the white fabric of the straightjacket as I bury my face into my knees, muffling my broken weeps.

“Rest now, Raven,” Jess murmurs, her voice grossly sweet again, like a lullaby turned sinister. “You’ll need your strength for what’s coming next.”

Suddenly she pauses, reaching over and she suddenly grabs my Mom’s necklace. She yanks and snaps it off my neck and I gasp like I’ve lost a part

of me.

“You wont be needing that!” she chirps, and I start wondering if all these doctors are more psychotic than the patients.

I shoot her a harsh glare, a death warning because I fucking mean it. I’m coming for that bitch first. She smirks before walking away, my Mom’s necklace tucked in her pocket.

The door clicks shut behind her, the heavy lock sliding into place and I feel like lay there for what feels like hours, my eyes staying shut, tears slipping through my lashes as I try to shut it all out—the blinding light, the suffocating room. But I can’t shut out my thoughts.

Ty.

His name lingers in my mind. I can almost see him, smell him, the way his rough hands felt against my skin, the way his voice could steady me even when everything else felt like it was spiraling out of control. Is he out there now? Is he looking for me? Or has he given up?

I try to push the thought away, but it keeps coming back, constant. What if he’s hurt? What if they’ve taken him too? Or worse, what if he’s gone—left me behind to rot in this padded fucking nightmare, where my screams are swallowed by the walls?

I bite my bottom lip, “No, that’s not him.” I whisper.

I picture him breaking down doors, his jaw clenched, his eyes dark with rage. He wouldn’t stop. He wouldn’t rest until he finds me. Until we’re together again.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Ty

The forest is a maze of towering trees and thick underbrush, each step an act of will as exhaustion claws at my body. The dull ache in my leg feels bone-deep, and the sharp edge of hunger gnaws at my stomach, but I push on, driven by a fire that won't let me fucking stop. Every muscle screams for relief, and when I finally collapse against a tree by the river, it feels like defeat is pressing down on me.

The river hums faintly, mocking me with its steady flow, as if to say I'll never find what I'm fucking looking for here. I tip my head back against the bark and close my eyes for a moment.

The memory surfaces again vividly—the half-crazed ramblings of a man on the second floor of Sacred Heights, who'd called himself a historian, a self-proclaimed expert on places like Sacred Heights. I remember the way his voice dipped to a whisper and how he talked about underground tunnels built long before the asylum even existed.

At the time, I didn't give a fuck. His words seemed like the delusions of someone trying to spin a story that made sense to him, but now, that conversation might be the only fucking lifeline I have.

The tunnels.

If they exist—and that's a big if—they could be my way in. No main gates, no guards, no cameras catching my face. Just shadows and silence.

My fist clenches at the thought that he might've been lying. He might've been fucking insane. But I don't have the luxury of rejecting anything right now.

I swipe my hand over my face, the stubble on my jaw scratching against my palm, and lean forward, staring into the river like it holds answers. It doesn't, of course. Just another dead end. I've been stalking this fucking

river for hours, my gut telling me the tunnels have to connect to it somehow. Water means erosion, and erosion means openings. At least that's the logic I'm clinging to. The other part of me—the darker, suspicious side—thinks I'm grasping at fucking straws.

The woods surrounding Sacred Heights have been my prison for the past day and a half. I've scouted them, my mind spiraling through every grim possibility of what they could be doing to her. To Raven.

My teeth grind as I think of her. My kitten. The one thing that gives me purpose in this fucking world. I flex my hands at my sides, trying to get myself together for her. Every second she's in their hands feels like a second too long, and it's eating the fuck away at me.

I try to piece things together, but my thoughts are a mess. Why did they take her? Is it just to draw me back? If so, it's working. I'm walking straight into the fucking trap they've probably set for me, but I don't care. I'll walk through hell if it means getting her out.

I rake a hand through my black hair and let out a low growl, my frustration spilling out. I'm so close to breaking. The thought of what they might be doing to her is a constant knife in my side, twisting deeper with every passing hour.

Every corner of my mind is hers, engraved in jagged pieces that twist and cling. She's an obsession so deeply chiselled into me, that I'd bleed before I let her go. She own's every part of me, and I'm addicted to her hold.

But I can't let it consume me. Not yet. Not now. I need to focus.

I force myself to my feet, my muscles groaning in protest. I stare down the riverbank, searching for anything—a break in the rock, a shadow that shouldn't be there, anything that could lead me to her.

I continue to trek, now a few miles away from Sacred Heights, until my foot lands on something strange. It feels hollow beneath me, uneven. I halt as my eyes dart to the ground. Slowly, I crouch down, swiping away layers of dirt and leaves with my gloved hand. Beneath them, I find it—a wooden surface, weathered and warped by time. My pulse quickens.

This is it. This is fucking it.

My hands scramble over the surface, searching for some kind of handle, a latch—anything—but there's nothing. The wood is solid, no visible means of entry. Frustration boils in my veins, but I don't have time for hesitation. I force myself upright and jump lightly, testing its strength. The ground gives a little, creaking ominously under my weight.

I jump again, harder this time.

CRACK!

The wood splinters beneath me, and suddenly, I'm falling. The world tilts as I'm sucked into the darkness, my body slamming against pointed wooden edges and stone steps. Each impact tears a grunt from my chest, pain shooting through my battered frame. My descent is a violent tumble, bone-jarring and disorienting, until finally, I hit the ground with a loud thud.

I groan, the wind knocked out of me, my vision swimming. Dust and dirt fill my nose and mouth, making me cough as I fight to lift my head. My entire body protests, bruised and battered from the fall, but I force myself to sit up. Shaking off the dizziness, I grab my phone from my pocket and flick on the flashlight.

The weak beam of light cuts through the pitch-black void around me, revealing walls of crumbling stone and an arched ceiling stretching high above. The space is wide and reeks of fungus. My light catches glimpses of debris—rusted tools, shattered glass, and what looks like old syringes littering the floor.

I stagger to my feet, wincing as pain shoots through my already wounded leg. I dust off my clothes with my cut hands. The tunnel stretches out before me, a long, dark corridor of stone that seems to go on forever.

I swipe the sweat from my brow, forcing myself to focus. This is no time to fuck about. I've made it this far. I can't stop now. I'm getting into this fucking place. The air grows colder as I press on, wrapping around me like icy fingers. The tunnel begins to incline, the air thickening with dampness.

My light catches something ahead—markings carved into the stone walls. I stop, narrowing my eyes as I shine the beam closer. Scratch marks. Deep, jagged grooves etched into the stone. They could be human, but there's no telling for sure. They're desperate, frenzied, as if someone or something clawed at the walls, trying to escape.

My ears prick at the sound of faint squeaks echoing down the tunnel. Rats. I swing my light to the right, and the beam lands on something that makes my gut twist. Cells. Rows of them, their rusted bars warped and corroded with age, line the right-hand side of the tunnel.

I step closer and angle the flashlight through the bars. Heavy chains dangle from the walls, their iron links as thick as my wrist. I move further down, sweeping the light along the grim, ancient remnants of this place until I freeze completely.

My beam lands on skeletal remains, their bones scattered across the filthy floor, brittle and yellowed with time. Some are chained to the walls, others hang from the ceiling, their restraints frozen mid-swing, like a sick mockery of life.

“Jesus fucking Christ. What the fuck is this place?” I whisper.

I knew this place was ancient, but this? This is another level of twisted. I step back forcing myself to focus. Cells like these mean I must be close. Wherever the fuck they’ve taken her, it can’t be far from here.

And then I see it.

A door at the top of some steps.

The faint outline of iron glimmers at the far end of the tunnel, bathed in the weak glow of my light. I pick up my pace, my heart racing as I reach it. My hands hover over the cold, iron handle, hesitating for just a moment. This is it. I tighten my grip, take a deep breath, and yank it open.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Raven

I sit in the main hall of the top floor, my head low. My freshly shaven scalp is hidden beneath the oversized hood of my gray sweatshirt. The room hums with low, disjointed noises—shuffling feet, quiet muttering, the occasional cough or cry. My gaze is locked on the bowl of plain porridge in front of me, the consistency reminding me of glue. My stomach churns at the sight of it, a weak growl echoing my disgust. With a frustrated shove, I slide the bowl away.

Suddenly, the chair beside me scrapes loudly across the floor. My body stiffens as someone plops down next to me, entirely uninvited. Out of the corner of my eye, I see her—a woman about my age, radiating energy that feels wildly out of place here.

“Hey!” she chirps brightly, leaning closer to try to catch my gaze. Her voice is cheerful, unnervingly so, completely and annoying opposite to the sombre, drug-laden atmosphere that smothers this place.

I turn my face away, pulling the hood lower. I don’t have the energy to talk to anyone, let alone someone who seems this unhinged. I’d normally have patience and care, but not when I’m in this predicament and somehow a patient myself.

The minutes drag like hours in this place. My head dips forward for a moment, my heavy-lidded eyes threatening to close entirely. The drugs still course through me, dulling my senses, making every thought feel like wading through quicksand.

When I finally lift my head again, I glance behind me, scanning the room. It’s a grim, surreal scene. Patients shuffle aimlessly, some mumbling confusedly to themselves. Others sit in corners, their hands clawing at their skin or twitching uncontrollably. A few remain utterly still, their empty eyes locked on some unseen horror.

“I don’t belong here,” I murmur, repeating the mantra like a lifeline. *This isn’t who I am. I’m not what they’re trying to make me believe.* I try to remind myself of Ty, of how he fought for his freedom. If he could do it, maybe I can too. Maybe, if I play along.

“I haven’t seen you before,” the woman beside me interrupts my spiraling thoughts. “When did you come in?” Her tone is light, like we’re sitting in a coffee shop instead of this fucking hell.

I sigh, pulling my sleeves further down over my arms, hiding the bruises. “I think… two days ago,” I say flatly, my voice devoid of emotion.

“Ahhh, they shocked you, huh?” she whispers giddily, as if we’re sharing some dark joke.

My head snaps to hers, my eyes narrowing slightly. For the first time, I take her in properly. Long black hair spills straight down her front, reaching her hips. She has a hood too, shading her sharp face and mischievous brown eyes. Despite the chaos around her, she looks oddly beautiful.

“They’ll do that a few times, you know,” she says with a sly smile, leaning closer as if we’re allies. “Trying to erase your memory. What did you do wrong?”

“I shouldn’t be here,” I reply evenly before I sigh, moving my eyes away.

She nods, her grin widening like I’ve just told her the punchline to some joke. “Me too,” she giggles, a strange sound that makes the hairs on the back of my neck stand up.

She doesn’t move, just keeps sitting there, her eyes glinting with a mix of curiosity and amusement.

I blink at her, trying to process her unsettling combine of detachment and bizarre cheerfulness. “How long have you been in here? And what have you done?”

She lifts her shoulders in a careless shrug. “I don’t know. I can’t remember. Dr Moss tells me it’s better that way. If I don’t remember my past, I can move on and be happy.”

My brows furrow. “What?”

Her voice takes on a singsong quality as she explains, “Everyone who comes in here goes through the same routine. Drugs, shock therapy, the truth serum...”

“Truth serum?” I repeat, my stomach twisting.

“Yeah…” Her expression shifts, her lips curving upward again like it’s some funny little secret. “It’s strange. Some people here say it’s like being drunk while someone whispers lies in your ear over and over until you start believing them. That’s what Joey said… before he made it down to the second floor.”

My head pounds as the information sinks in. “Why the fuck would they do this to people? Don’t you know these methods are illegal now?”

Her eyes widen like I just told her the funniest joke in the world. “They are? How funny!” She giggles, a sound so discordant with reality that it grates against my ears.

I resist the urge to roll my eyes. I’m too exhausted to try to sympathize with her or anyone else here right now. Somehow, I’ve become a fucking patient myself.

“So why are you still on this floor?” I ask, trying to focus.

She glances around the room with the same detached gaze before shrugging again. “Dr Moss said I’ll be moving down soon.”

I nod absently, my mind spinning in an increasingly blurry mess of fear and anger. “Do you know how to get out of here?”

She tilts her head to the side, blinking at me rapidly like a bird trying to understand. “You want to escape?”

“Of course, I want to fucking escape,” I snap. “Who the fuck wouldn’t?”

Her shoulders straighten, her cheerful facade fading slightly as my tone registers. “Well, I’m not sure. We’re not allowed out much, and the only time I’ve seen outside was during an alarm drill.”

My gaze flickers across the room, searching for anything resembling a fire alarm or an exit.

“Oh, you won’t find one in here,” she says nonchalantly, leaning in as though sharing another secret. “They’re in the hallways, but they’re locked with fobs.”

I sag, my shoulders heavy with exhaustion and hopelessness. Running my hands over my face, I take a deep breath to steady myself.

“Tell me,” I say after a moment, “what kind of people come here? Any more young people?”

“Oh, yeah,” she replies lightly. “Kids come in here frequently. Some stay, some go. Right now, there aren’t any.”

My pulse quickens. “Why? Do they go through the same ‘therapy’ as everyone else?”

She nods, her face going blank, her gaze unfocused. “Yes, they do. Sometimes they’re sent here by their parents to be… cured. Or so I’ve heard.”

Her words tighten the coil of dread in my chest. The puzzle pieces fall into place, one by one, forming a picture that makes my blood boil. Sacred Heights isn’t just some forgotten asylum—it’s part of the system. It explains everything. Why they took Ty when he was thirteen. Why they’ve taken me now. They want to erase us. To stop us from speaking.

This is about control. About secrets.

“Dr Moss doesn’t like it when people aren’t cured,” the girl says suddenly, her voice faint, as if speaking from another plane. “When that happens, he tries harder. And it hurts.”

I lean in, my breath hitching as her focus snaps back to me. “Has anyone ever pretended to be cured… and he’s found out?”

Her face lights up in a chilling smile before falling flat again, almost robotic. “Oh yes. That makes him very, very angry.”

A chill runs down my spine, my skin prickling. My mind races. Dr Moss knows. He knows what Ty’s been doing. Letting him out wasn’t a mistake—it was a test, a trap to see if he’d slip. This isn’t about rehabilitation.

It’s a fucking game.

“Has there been any riots in here?” I whisper, my eyes wide as I take a quick glance behind me.

“Not often, but I’ve seen a few.”

My eyes snap to hers. “What happens?”

A giggle escapes her lips, almost like she's remembering something darkly amusing. "Well, once Joanie shouted at the top of her lungs that they're trying to kill us, and the place went crazy. Staff were attacked, but they overpowered us."

I just stare at her, a sick feeling twisting in my stomach. I drop my head with a sigh, trying to process it all.

"I've heard there's a way out." She suddenly says and my attention darts to her.

My heartbeat picks up as I lean in slightly. "Where?"

She leans closer, her voice dropping to a whisper. "I've heard there's a door at the back of the kitchen on the lowest floor. It's supposed to be an escape route, but of course, it's useless with all the security here."

I raise an eyebrow, the gears in my mind already turning. "Not everything is impossible if someone here isn't out of their mind."

Her eyes widen with excitement, and for a brief moment, I see something dangerous behind her unhinged smile. "Can I help?"

I lean closer, lowering my voice to a near whisper, my eyes scanning the room for any prying eyes or listening ears. "If you're serious about helping, then I need you to focus. No giggling, no distractions. Got it?"

Her expression shifts, the usual unhinged giddiness melting into something sharper. She nods eagerly, her excitement now toughened with a hint of seriousness.

"You said there's a door in the kitchen on the lowest floor. Tell me everything you know about it."

"It's hidden, tucked behind a storage rack."

"Good," I mutter, already planning. "And what happens during those riots you mentioned? When things get out of control, how do the staff respond?"

Her lips curl into a sly grin, and she leans even closer. "When the patients riot, the staff panic. They go all in, trying to lock down the floor and subdue the chaos. It's all hands-on deck for wherever the trouble is."

Containment—exactly what I need.

I nod, my mind racing. “Alright, here’s the plan. We’re going to start something. Something big enough to pull every single staff member to the main floor. While they’re scrambling to contain it, I’m going to get a keycard for the doors, and we’ll make it downstairs to the kitchen.”

“You’re going to start a riot?”

I smirk faintly. “Not just me. We’re going to start a riot. And we’re going to make it count.”

For a moment, she stares at me, the weight of my words settling in. Then, her lips twitch with a small, devilish smile.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Ty

The door's strength pisses me the fuck off. This is the last fucking thing I need—a door standing between me and what I came here for.

I reach into the bag slung over my shoulder, my hand brushing against the cold steel. My fingers close around the handle of the axe. There's something satisfying about holding my weapon—the primal energy it gives me.

With a quick motion, I pull the axe free from the bag and raise it above my head. I don't hesitate. With a growl, I swing the axe with everything I've got, the heavy wood biting into the door. It splinters with a satisfying crack, and I swing again, this time with more power. The wood shatters, falling apart in pieces, a massive hole opening in the door with each swing.

Another strike.

And another.

Then I give it a firm shove with my shoulder, and I burst through it, smashing into a steel trolly, pots and pans spilling onto the floor, echoing and crashing.

Fuck.

I don't even stop to check the damage, don't care about the fucking noise I've made. My focus is on what lies ahead. Raven is here. I can feel it and it's time to cause absolute mayhem.

Welcome fucking home, Ty

I storm toward the double doors, my boots slamming against the floor, the axe still heavy in my grip. I don't give a shit about making noise anymore. I'm done being quiet, done sneaking around.

But as I reach for the door, the sound of footsteps in front of me freezes me mid-motion. I watch as the door swings open, and there he is—the chef. His eyes widen when he sees me, the kitchen knife in his hand suddenly looking like a fucking toy in comparison to the axe I'm holding.

He barely has time to react.

I lunge forward, grabbing him by the throat with one hand, lifting him off his feet. His body struggles, his hands flapping, before I shove him, and he stumbles backward. I bring the axe down in a swift, brutal sweep. The sound of steel ripping through flesh echoes in the room. His scream is cut short as I slash across his chest, opening him up like a gutted fish.

He's against the wall, blood spurting from the wound, but I don't give him a chance to recover. With a savage yank, I drag him back to me, the chef's gasps filling the air before I brutally bury the axe deep into his stomach.

I pull the blade free, his blood staining my hands, and he crumples to the floor in a heap, twitching, choking on his own blood.

I barely glance at him, my eyes already searching. And there it is—a keycard, dangling from a chain around his neck.

I rip it off, slipping it into my pocket with quick, practiced movements.

One down.

I glance at the door once more, eyes burning with rage. I push through the kitchen door, stepping over the chef's lifeless body, my mind locked on one thing—getting to her.

…

I move cautiously, each step echoes off the walls as I slip through the halls, the memories of my years spent inside here flooding back. Fifteen years. I know this place like the back of my hand—the layout, the blind spots, the cameras. It's all second nature to me now. The only thing that's different is that I'm not a fucking prisoner anymore.

The quiet in the halls unsettles me. Too quiet. It doesn't sit right. When I hit the last set of doors on the top floor, the sound of muffled voices rises up ahead. Something's off.

Suddenly, I hear shouting. Then, louder turmoil, footsteps pounding against the floor. Things smashing. I don’t wait another second.

I charge forward, my heart racing before I peer through a barred and secured door, the scene in front of me is pure chaos.

There’s a riot happening, people screaming, tearing through the hallway like they’ve lost their minds. A few staff members are rushing to contain the situation, but they’re being overwhelmed. My eyes catch a young woman sprinting after a staff member, shouting something I can’t make out.

Another woman is close behind her, and in a blur of motion, they corner the doctor against the wall. They’re attacking her, clawing at her clothes, but the doctor—a woman with a sharp, cold look—holds them back with an electric prod, waving it in front of them like she’s trying to keep some control.

And then it hits me.

No fucking way.

I squint, my heart sinking as recognition slams into me. That’s Jess. The woman of that guy I killed in the shitty toilet.

What the fuck is she doing here?

But before I can piece it together, the situation escalates. One of the attackers overpowers Jess, slamming her to the ground. The other woman isn’t far behind, searching through the pockets of the doctor. The woman with dark hair, the one holding her down, is trying to choke the fucking life out of her.

I glance around, scanning the mayhem. Staff members are distracted. I can’t waste time. I move swiftly, swiping the keycard before pulling on the barred door.

Just as I step into the main hall, where chaos is unfolding in all directions, everything slows. The sounds of screaming and frantic movement echoing around me. And then, at the far end of the hallway, a woman turns and our gazes lock.

Her blue eyes stay on mine, and for a split second, everything else fades away. My heart lurches, and I can barely. I didn’t known what to expect when I came through these fucking doors, but seeing her—*my kitten*—

standing there, looking like a ghost but alive, it hits me harder than anything.

Before I can even process it, she's charging toward me, moving faster than I ever thought she could move.

"Kitten," I mutter but I barely get the word out before she's in my arms.

I catch her as she leaps into me, her body crashing against mine. I hold her tight, squeezing her the life out of her. Her sobs soak into my hoodie, and all I can do to just hold on, not giving a fuck about anything else.

"You came for me!" she cries, her body trembling.

"Of course I fucking came for you, my kitten," I mumble back as I bury my face in her neck.

I pull back to look at her, grabbing her face and give her kiss after kiss on her soft lips until a sudden sharp pain strikes my back. I grunt as something heavy smashes into my spine, knocking the wind out of me and my body tenses as I knock into Raven.

The rage that surges through me is animalistic. I whirl around, barely registering the man standing behind me before my axe is in flying the air, my arms moving without thought. I hear a wet sound as the blade slices through his throat. Blood explodes in a gruesome spray, and he falls to the floor, dead before he even hit the fucking ground.

I don't waste a second. I pull Raven behind me, her hand in mine as I drag her toward the door. My senses are on fire now—everything is a fucking blur of movement and instinct. We rush through the hallway, hearing more shouting, the sounds of the riot intensifying around us, but nothing fucking matters except getting her the fuck out of here.

When we reach the door, I swipe the keycard, and it slides open with a soft beep. We're moving again, but my mind is focused only on the stairs ahead. Down. We need to go down.

We're running down the stairs when I notice the woman Raven was with. She's trailing behind us, her head down, her steps keeping up with ours.

Raven squeezes my hand and whispers, "She helped me."

I raise an eyebrow, but then I nod. There's no time to ask questions, not now. I tighten my hold on Raven's hand, pulling us toward the kitchen on

the lowest floor.

We’re so fucking close.

As we round the corner to the kitchen, but I stop dead in my tracks, pulling Raven close to my side as I scan the room. There, near the center, standing like he owns the damn place, is Dr Moss. His icy gaze is fixed on us, and I feel the rage stir deep inside me again. The bastard’s face barely hides the malice behind his eyes.

“Ah, so you decided to make it this far,” he says, his voice smooth, almost like he’s enjoying this twisted fuck around. “Welcome home, Ty. I’ve been waiting for you. You lied to me.”

The two doctors flanking him are already positioned like a fucking wall, holding electric rods, the occasional zap snapping through the air.

I tighten my grip on my axe, my knuckles white from the pressure. Raven’s trembling fingers attempt to slip from mine, but I don't dare let go.

“Move,” I growl, the word barely leaving my lips as I step forward.

Dr Moss’s smile stretches wider, as if he’s enjoying this moment. “You really think you can just walk away?” His tone is calm. “It’s not that easy, Mr Easton.”

“Don’t fucking call me that,” I snap with a scowl, my dad’s most used name striking straight through me.

The two doctors behind him take a step forward, closing in on us. Their faces blank, detached, but I can see the threat in their stance, the way they grip their electric rods.

“You can’t leave,” Dr Moss finally says, his voice growing colder. “You both lied. You both need to be cured.”

Raven scoffs beside me, “You’re out of your damn mind creep. You need curing.”

Suddenly, the doctor on the left lunges at us, his hand reaching for something at his belt, likely a syringe full of some fucked-up drug. I don’t wait to see what it is—before he even gets close enough to jab me, I swing my axe in a wide curve, slamming the blade into his side. The sickening sound of metal meeting flesh fills the air, and he lets out a strangled cry as he crumples to the ground, blood pooling beneath him.

The second doctor hesitates for a fraction of a second, shock spreading across his face before his eyes flicker toward Moss. I see the acknowledgement in his eyes—he knows that I won't fucking hesitate to kill his ass.

"Which one of you motherfuckers are next?" I ask, a wide grin stretching across my face, now holding my axe in both hands, shuffling on my feet.

The doctor eyes me warily, his hand still gripping the syringe and electric rod, but I don't wait for him to make a move. With one swift motion, I bring my axe up again, the sharp steel gleaming in the harsh light as I swing it down toward him. He jumps back, narrowly avoiding the blade, but I'm already on him, closing the distance too quickly.

He stumbles, and with a sickening twist of my wrist, I drive the axe into his shoulder, spinning him around and slamming him against the counter. I don't even think twice, I yank the blade from his shoulder, catch Raven's hand again, dragging her toward the back of the kitchen. But before we can take another step, a sudden, cold voice slices through the tension.

"Not so fast."

I halt, realizing I ain't done with this fucker. I don't even need to look, I hear the way Dr Moss's voice oozes with malice and control. Every muscle in my body is ready to move—but before I can react, a sharp gasp rips through the air.

I turn to see Dr Moss standing there, a needle in one hand, pressing it against the throat of the dark-haired woman—the one Raven had been with, the one who helped her escape. The girl's breath is catching in her throat as Moss holds her like a puppet, his other hand gripping her arm

"Release her," Raven growls, but Dr Moss doesn't give a shit, bad shit crazy cunt.

"Relax, Ty," Dr Moss hushes, his smile thin and dangerous. "You really think you're in control here?" He leans in closer to the girl, the needle digging slightly into her skin, making her wince. "Don't worry, it's just a little prick. You'll be fine. If you're lucky."

I take a step forward, my axe still in hand and try to think of all different ways to fuck this cunt up.

Dr Moss looks directly into my eyes, gleaming with cold amusement. “Do you know who she is?” he asks, voice dripping with mockery. “This lovely woman? She’s your sister.”

My entire body freezes in place, and I look at the young woman, still not able to see some of her face beneath her hood as she struggles against him. My mind begins to spiral as the words hit me. Penny?

“What the hell are you talking about, old man?” I spit, stepping toward them, his heart racing. “My sister’s fucking dead.”

Dr Moss laughs, a cold, bone-chilling laugh that makes my blood boil. “Not dead, just forgotten. You see, I have a little thing for keeping people like her. Your sister... She’s not as far gone as you think, Ty. She’s been under my care since the week she went ‘missing’. She been under your nose for the last fifteen years. You two have been some of my greatest and worse experiments.”

I feel like everything’s spinning out of control, my mind racing, but before I can say anything, the dark-haired girl suddenly moves. In a desperate flash of action, she stamps down on Dr Moss’s foot, hard, with a loud crunch. Dr Moss groans in pain, his grip loosening just enough for her to break free. I reach out, grabbing her hoodie and yanking her behind me.

“Now what mother fucking cunt.” I bite out.

Dr Moss snarls, a look of pure rage twisting his features, but I don’t hesitate. I stride toward the walk-in oven, the handle cold under my hand. I yank it open, revealing the dark interior, the metal shelves inside. I don’t give it a second thought. As Moss charges toward me, eyes full of wrath, I take a swift step forward, swinging the axe high and bringing it down hard.

Dr Moss shrieks as soon as my axe slashes through him and his arm falls to the ground with a splattering thud. He grits his teeth, but before he can react, Raven lifts her leg, kicking her foot straight into his balls with all her strength, making him fall to his knees with a loud groan.

Without hesitation, I grab him by the scuff of the neck and chuck him inside the oven before closing the door and locking it with a final click. We watch through the window as Dr Moss roars in fury, scrambling toward us, trying to claw his way out of the oven.

I smack the button, turning the temperature up to max. The oven begins to hum to life, the sound of the heat starting to rise as the fire behind him comes to life. Then, he stands eerily still. He stares at all three of us expressionlessly, devoid of emotion, but I notice he digs for something in his pants. When I see it's a button, my eyes expand slightly, knowing exactly what it is.

His voice—weak but filled with venom—echoes from inside the oven. "I never lose," he hisses. "And I take everything with me if I do."

"He's going to blow this place to pieces," I mutter under my breath, my blood turning to ice as the realization of what the fuck is happening sinks in. Without wasting another second, I grab the girls' arms and whip around.

The sound of Dr Moss's voice pierces the chaos. It's louder now, twisted with manic glee. "You'll never escape! It's too late for us all!"

I pull the girls down the stairs, pushing forward like a man possessed before our feet pound against the old muddy ground, racing through the dark tunnel. The sound of Dr Moss's laughter is swallowed by the thunderous roar that follows—a deafening blast shakes the entire underground like a fist slamming into the earth.

Then I hear it.

Bang!

The explosion rips through the air, the shockwave hitting us hard, a deep shudder that rattles every bone in my body. Dust rains down on us, making it harder to see, to breathe. The rumble comes next, closer and closer, the ground beneath us shaking with the fury of the blast.

I grit my teeth, my heart hammering, very muscle and the wound in my leg screams at me, but I won't stop until we're out. We're so close—just a little further. A sharp crack sounds behind us, followed by a tremor that nearly knocks me off balance. I glance back and that's when I see it, the tunnel collapsing. The walls crash and buckle, the ceiling giving way with terrifying speed.

Shit.

I pull them up the stairs, pushing with everything I have left. As soon as we reach the top, I shove them both forward, their bodies smacking onto the muddy ground of the woods as they tumble down.

Without thinking, I shield them with my body as the massive explosion erupts behind us. A shockwave blasts out of the tunnel, debris flying like shrapnel. The force is enough to knock the wind out of me as chunks of stone rain down on us. I can hear it—splintering wood, screaming metal, the thunderous roar of the collapse.

We lay there, bodies pressed into the dirt, the world shaking around us as the explosion surges. When things quiet down, I finally raise my head, eyes scanning the devastation behind us. The tunnel is gone. Collapsed into nothing but rubble, the gaping hole where it used to be is now a graveyard of stone and twisted metal.

I look down at Raven, trying to shake the dirt from my face, her hoodie pulled over her head. I move it away gently, my hands shaking from the adrenaline.

“You good?” I ask, my voice hoarse as I search her face, trying to find any sign of injury, any sign of pain.

“Yeah,” she groans, pushing herself up slowly, her body heavy from the impact. All that fucking matters is she’s alive and here. She slowly gets to her knees, trying to shake the dizziness from her head.

I take a deep breath, forcing myself to stand and offer a hand. I turn around slowly until I’m staring up at Sacred Heights through the tree’s, still looming on the hill above us. But now, it’s nothing more than a pile of crumbling stone and debris, smoke billowing into the air, black and thick, as flames flicker in the distance.

“Selfish, sick prick!” Raven screams beside me, her voice cracking as she chokes back a sob. “He killed them all…”

I pull her into me, wrapping my arms tightly around her. I kiss the top of her head, the only part of her I can reach right now. But then, instinct kicks in. I turn, warily scanning the space around us, and that’s when my eyes land on the girl standing a few feet behind us. Her head is lowered, her hands trembling as they clutch her hoodie and my eyes narrow as I size her up.

“Take your hood down,” I say, my voice steady but laced with suspicion. She doesn’t move immediately, hesitation in every inch of her, but eventually, she gently lowers it. I take in her long black hair, shining and

straight. But when she lifts her eyes to mine, I feel my heart stops dead in my chest.

“Penny?” The word escapes me as a shaky whisper.

She blinks at me, and I see it in her eyes. It’s her. It’s fucking her. I don’t know what the fuck is happening. My whole world just tilted, but there she is, standing in front of me like some ghost come back to life. All those years. My eyes burn, and before I can stop myself, I grab her, yanking her into me with a force that makes her gasp.

“Penny,” I whisper again as I cradle her against me and I bury my face in her hair, my heart thundering as I realize that she’s here. She’s really here.

I grab her face, scanning her eyes frantically, “You a-fucking-live?”

She looks at me blankly like she doesn’t know who the fuck I am, like she’s trying to figure everything out. As if she’s trying to make out the features of my face.

I glance down at Raven, still beside me, and she’s staring at us both, her eyes wide with shock. The moment hangs there, and I try to calm myself, but I can’t. All the grief, all the loss, everything I thought I had buried deep inside me comes crashing to the surface.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Raven

Late at the motel, the atmosphere feels strangely peaceful after everything that's happened. Me and Ty sit on the double bed and is Penny laid down with Midnight curled up beside her, slowly drifting off to sleep, exhaustion pulling her into a deeper slumber. I glance at Ty, and for a brief second, we share a knowing smile, one of those silent exchanges that says everything without a word. It's bittersweet, watching Penny finally get the rest she deserves.

We'd had a long conversation before Penny finally passed out, and the pieces of the puzzle started falling into place. It turns out Penny was put into Sacred Heights shortly after the night she was taken, then she forced into Sacred Heights to be 'taught obedience' by their parents. I can see now that Ty feels some guilt about it. He said he was the one who encouraged her to be rebellious, to push back against the system, but none of that was his fault. None of this nightmare was. It wasn't his fault that they twisted everything so badly.

But the truth was darker than we could've imagined. When Ty killed his parents, believing they had sold Penny off to some horrible fate, Dr Moss saw an opportunity. He decided to keep Penny and take Ty as well—one to experiment on and manipulate, and the other to try to 'rebuild' and play games with. He could've even manipulated the documents, the court system, to get Ty the insanity plea he needed, to send him straight to Sacred Heights. Which, in turn, makes me wonder: was Ty's diagnosis ever accurate, or was it just another lie to keep him there? Was any of this real, or just part of the twisted game Dr Moss and everyone else played with their lives?

Dr Moss was a sick man, no doubt about it. But he was something far worse than just a mad doctor. His twisted outlook, his manipulation, it runs deeper than we thought. His methods were part of a larger, more insidious system—one linked to corruption, sex trafficking, and more. It's too much to process, too many unanswered questions, and some things we might never figure out. But right now, all that matters is this. Us three. Together. Ty and Penny, reunited, and maybe, just maybe, Ty will start to feel whole again.

It's been a long road to get here, filled with madness, with chaos, but somehow, we've made it. I can't even begin to imagine what Ty feels in this moment. Relief? Sadness? Regret? It's all swirling inside him, I know it. But time will heal those wounds. They have to.

As Penny's breathing evens out and she falls into a deeper sleep, Ty stands up from the bed and looks down at me. He holds his hand out, and without thinking, I slide mine into his. It feels right—natural, even. Without a word, he pulls me to my feet, leading me to the door.

The night air is cool as he opens the door, stepping through first, then sliding his arm around my shoulders. He pulls me into his side, and together, we walk towards my car across the parking lot. For a moment, everything feels almost normal again, like we're just two people walking down a quiet street, free from everything that came before.

When we reach the car, Ty swings open the back door and lets me slide into the seat first. He follows shortly after, closing the door behind him with a soft thud.

As soon as he's settled beside me, his long legs crammed awkwardly into the back seat, I lean over to pull the front seat forward, giving him more room. As I stretch, I feel his palm run over my ass, giving it a squeeze with a rumble in his chest. I roll my eyes with a smirk, turning back toward him, but before I can say anything, his hands are already on me, seizing my waist and pulling me into his lap.

I let him guide me, settling onto his thighs and straddling him, my body fitting against his perfectly. His hands slide under my hoodie, his touch warm, and I gasp softly as his lips brush against mine. I shift my hips, my pussy grinding over his length, and a low growl rolls from his throat.

He lifts a hand, reaching for the edge of my hoodie to pull it down. I stiffen instinctively, grabbing his wrist mid-movement. My breath catches in my throat, and I lower my head, trying to steady myself.

His brows knit. “What’s up, beautiful girl?” he asks quietly.

I shake my head, a tear slipping free and trailing down my cheek. It’s everything—all of it crashing over me at once. The shaved hair. The torture. The relentless exhaustion of trying to survive.

“I’m sorry,” I whisper, sniffing back more tears. “I’m being selfish and just having a moment.”

He stays quiet, waiting and when I finally let go of his wrist, he doesn’t hesitate. Slowly, gently, he continues pulling my hood back. My heart races, and I keep my gaze down, unwilling to meet his eyes as I wait for his reaction.

“Look at me, freckles,” he says quietly, his voice like a soft command.

I lift my gaze reluctantly, my wet eyes meeting his light brown ones. His face doesn’t falter—there’s no shock, no pity. Instead, his lips tug into a soft smile, his dimples deepening as his hand moves up to rub over my shaved head.

“I fucking dig it,” he says, his grin widening.

A small laugh bubbles out of me, unexpected but so needed. His smile grows in response, lighting up his face in a way that makes my chest ache.

He leans in, pressing a kiss to my forehead, and when he pulls back, his expression turns more serious, though his eyes remain soft. He cups my face in his hands, wiping away the tears with his thumbs.

“You still look fucking beautiful, you know that, right?”

I nod, swallowing hard. “Thank you,” I whisper. “It’ll grow back one day. It’s not that important.”

His jaw tightens slightly, and his hands slide down to rest on my neck.

“Did they hurt you, kitten?” Ty’s voice is low, almost a growl, but there’s a tenderness in the way his hands steady themselves on my hips.

I lower my gaze, unable to meet his piercing eyes and my silence says more than words ever could. “A little,” I admit quietly, lifting my gaze back to his. “But I’m okay. I’ll be fine. None of that matters now.”

He watches me carefully, as though searching for any cracks I might be hiding. I tilt my head, shuffling closer to him, needing the closeness to ground me. His hands tighten on my waist before they slide down, wrapping firmly around the curve of my ass, fingers pressing possessively into my skin.

“What about you? How are you doing?”

His dark eyes roam over me, taking me in slowly. “I feel good,” he murmurs, though his words come out rough. “Too good, actually. I don’t know what to fucking do with myself.”

A small smile tugs at my lips. “Well, you’ve got a lot of freedom now,” I say, my tone lightening. “And so does your little sister. There’s so much you two haven’t seen or done. You’ve got your whole lives ahead of you.”

He lets out a soft chuckle, the sound vibrating against me as his arm snakes around my back, pulling me flush against him. His other hand trails down again, gripping the curve of my ass as our lips brush, the heat between us sparking like a live wire.

“You want to go on an adventure with me, kitten?” he whispers.

I smirk against his lips, feeling his grin mirror mine. “Sure do,” I reply, my tone playful. “With you.”

His lips ghost against mine, teasing, as he murmurs, “You want to fucking keep me now?”

My heart flips at his words, the vulnerability hidden beneath the boldness, and I tilt my head, my hand sliding up to cradle his face. “Always,” I whisper back, sealing my promise with a kiss that sends shivers down my spine.

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EPILOGUE

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TY

“Raven, take this next left,” I say, staring down at the map in my lap. The evening, summer breeze sweeps through the open window beside me, carrying the scent of dusk. The sun is setting, casting a warm orange hue across the horizon.

She turns the steering wheel, and I lift my head to look at the road ahead, a long path shrouded by woodland. Then I see it—bright lights flickering through the trees in the distance.

“We’re going to the carnival?” Penny shrieks from the back seat, clapping her hands excitedly.

I chuckle, glancing back at her, then shift my gaze to Raven. The glow of the colored lights dances in her blue eyes, and I can’t help but smirk before turning back to the road. Looming above the archway ahead, the sign stands cold and clear:

“Welcome to Oddity Carnival & Cirque.”

Memories swirl to life in my mind, broken but vivid. I remember a time long ago when my dad dumped me at a massive stone building—some kind of castle filled with kids. I must’ve been about twelve. For around a week, I stayed there, surrounded by other children.

That’s where I met them. A couple of boys who, for that brief moment, had my fucking back. We stuck together, a disobedient little crew, running rings around the sickos in charge. We made their lives hell, pulling pranks and causing chaos.

For that one week—despite the pain and fear—we managed to carve out something that almost felt like fun. All four of us bunkered down in a tiny room, talking late into the night.

But during my madness, I’d buried those memories deep, too consumed by other things to think about the past. Even those rare, passing moments of light had been drowned out by the darkness.

As the car pulls closer to the carnival gates, I feel a mix of nostalgia and unease rising within me.

I never thought I'd see them again. Their names escape me now, lost in the fog of time, but I remember their faces. They were about my age back then, maybe a little younger, I don't know. It was six months later when I came here as a kid with my dad to watch some messed-up horror show that I saw them again.

I remember spotting them amidst the mayhem of the carnival lights. They looked different—older somehow, tougher. They were just starting out, working here as performers or maybe something darker. We didn't speak. We weren't allowed. I wasn't allowed *friends*.

But as we locked eyes across the carnival grounds, we shared a moment of unspoken understanding. A simple nod that said more than words could, before life pulled us apart again.

I never saw them after that.

Not until the weird-ass messages started coming during my warpath. Those three pairs of spiral eyes staring back at me through my window still haunt my memory. At the time, I didn't put two and two together. I had no clue who the hell it could've been.

A month after everything went down, I sent a single text to that number —a wordless expression of gratitude for having my back in the shadows. Just one word:

Respect.

I didn't expect a reply, but I got one. Just one simple emoji.

As soon as I saw it, the memories came crashing back. It all clicked.

It was *them*.

The kids from that short week of rebellion. The ones who'd stood by me in the darkest hours. And now? This fucking carnival. It was theirs. They reign here, I just know it.

As we pull up, I glance around through the windscreen, taking in the huge circus on the backdrop of the starry sky. The Ferris wheel, the

rollercoaster and all the amusements. This carnival is buzzing with life and screams.

I unclip my seatbelt and glance at Raven and Penny.

“Just so you know, this is a fucking horror carnival.”

“Even better!” Penny squeals before bolting out the back door.

I chuckle before looking at Raven beside me as she studies me with a grin. “What are we doing here?” she raises an eyebrow.

“Having some fun…” I say, winking before stepping out of the car.

The summer air wraps around me, carrying the sweet aroma of popcorn and candy on a warm breeze. I pull my hood up, hiding under its shadow as I meet Raven at the front of the car. Sliding my arm around her shoulders, I pull her close and press a kiss to her forehead. Together, we head toward the madness ahead.

As we step through the gates, the carnival hums with chaotic energy. Performers in garish costumes dart around, leaping out to startle unsuspecting visitors. One jumps toward us, making Raven flinch and bury her face into my side. A smirk tugs at my lips. She doesn’t find it as funny as I do.

I scan the swirling lights and shadows around us, keeping my eyes sharp. Somewhere in the crowd, I know I’ll see them.

Those spiral eyes.

Raven stops at one of the game booths, Penny already engrossed in the spectacle. I keep my distance, a cigarette slipping between my lips as a strange feeling creeps up my spine.

Slowly, I turn my head, then my body follows.

And then I see him.

Black and white spiral eyes stare back at me through the haze of carnival lights. The pandemonium around us seems to fade, the noise dulling into a low hum as we lock eyes.

He doesn’t move. Neither do I.

With a flick of my lighter, the cigarette crackles to life. I take a slow drag, side-eyeing Raven to make sure she’s distracted. Then, without a word, I start toward him.

The closer I get, the more I notice the changes. The face paint. The swirling tattoos coiling up his body. The years etched into his expression, but that aura of chaos still clinging to him like a second skin.

I lift my chin in silent acknowledgment.

He matches my movement, and wordlessly, we begin walking side by side through the carnival.

The silence stretches between us, broken only by the distant screams and laughter of the crowd. I take another deep drag of my cigarette, letting the smoke curl around my lips before I speak.

“So, you stayed here, huh?” My voice cuts through the noise. “This place is your home now?”

He tilts his head, those spiral eyes darting to the glowing lights and colourful mayhem around us.

“This is my home, Slasher,” he says, his voice is a low growl.

I smirk and shake my head. “Yeah, that's not gonna fucking stick.”

“Why the fuck not? You finally finished tearing that shitty little town apart?” he says, pulling a cigarette out of his leather jacket, lighting it with a flick of his thumb.

“I think so,” I reply, blowing out a cloud of smoke.

“Yeah,” he scoffs, his tone calm but laced with something darker. “Not sure how you come back from the onslaught you created.”

We stop, facing each other.

“I owe you.”

He shakes his head once, dismissively, and looks away. “Nah. Go live your fucking life. You killed your captors. You’re not bound to anyone, and you don’t owe me shit.”

I study him as he takes another drag from his cigarette. He seems detached, calm, but there’s something lurking beneath his eyes. I can’t quite place it.

“Why’d you do it...” I trail off as his spiral eyes snap to mine.

“They call me Hell here,” he says, and I nod before he continues. “Curiosity at first. You would’ve fucking died, Ty,” he goes on, dragging on

his cigarette. “You had no one when you were going against those motherfucks. Plus, it was fun watching you go on your rampage. You weren’t touching my society, but fuck... you’re a messy, unbothered cunt. The amount of cleaners I had to call in...”

I can’t help but chuckle, glancing over at Raven in the distance.

“I’d been watching you for years,” he continues, his voice more serious now. “Heard about you killing your parents. Found out when you were getting out of that asylum. I knew... I fucking knew you weren’t gonna stay out of trouble. You have murder in your veins and you’re a mad cunt, like the rest of us. Some fuckers just deserve to be slaughtered.”

I raise an eyebrow, studying his face. “I guess that means you ended up submitting to that society you were talking about all those years ago?”

He growls before turning sideways and we start walking again, “Yeah…”

“Well, if you ever need a psychopath with his axe, call me. Darkness shrouds us, Hell and there’s no escaping it. It’s injected in our fucking veins.”

He turns his head, studying me for a moment, then gives a small nod in a mutual understanding. I tap him on the shoulder, and he glances down at it before I take steps back. His eyes flash to mine one last time, and he watches me disappear into the chaos.

…

I catch up with Raven, my arm casually draped over her shoulder as we walk through the carnival, the sounds of laughter and chaotic sounds surrounding us. I steal a kiss from her lips, hard and lingering. Penny’s running ahead, her craziness lighting up the night, free from the weight she once carried. After some time with her, she finally remembered me, and it makes everything feel whole. Me feel whole.

With Raven by my side, I feel like I can take on anything. The darkness, the fucking chaos, the mistakes—she accepts me, bat-shit unhinged and all. I love her for it. Now, we move forward together, one step at a time, not just for revenge or survival but to build the life we were denied. To make things right but also to live the lives we’ve always wanted.

Raven showed me that no matter how dark things get, there’s always something that can make you feel the light. Sometimes, it’s in the people

you love, and sometimes, it’s in the strength you didn’t know you fucking had. With her and Penny, I’m finally where I’m meant to be—ready for whatever comes next. A new chapter, and for the first time in a lifetime, I finally feel, *peace*, even in the carnage I call home.

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